NATION

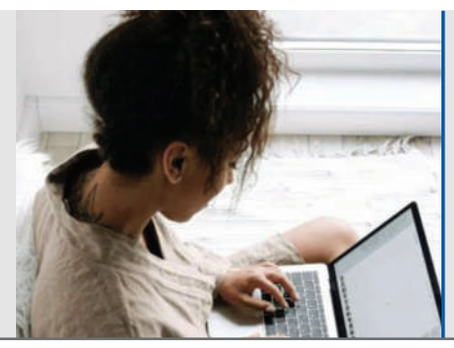
2 Russia agents under scanner for sending Indians to war

>> Page: 4 <<

BUSINESS

'Board seats held by women in India Inc surged 18pc in 5 yrs'

>> Page: 7 <<



SPORTS

'Board seats held by women in India Inc surged 18pc in 5 yrs'

>> Page: 8 <<

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PHOTO: PTI

France seals right to abortion in its Constitution

PARIS, 8 MARCH

France's leadership will use a Napoleon-era press to seal the right to abortion into the country's constitution in a historic ceremony on Friday that's open to the public and designed to show support to women across the world on International Women's Day. France is the first country to explicitly guarantee abortion rights in the national charter. While abortion is a deeply divisive issue in the United States, it's legal in nearly all of Europe and overwhelmingly supported in France, where it's seen more as a question of public health and not politics. French legislators approved the constitutional amendment on Monday in a 780-72 vote that was backed by many far-right lawmakers. *—AP*

>>>More on Page 6

Cong's plea to stop action against bank accounts junked

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Income Tax Appellate Tribunal on Friday dismissed Congress party's appeal against the imposition of penalty for discrepancies in tax returns for previous years and said it was exploring all legal options and will move the high court against it very soon. Sources said the tribunal had dismissed the appeal of Congress for the imposition of penalties of Rs 210 crore by the Income Tax department here on Friday. Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said the party is exploring all legal options and would move the high court "very soon". "BJP government has deliberately chosen the timing of this to coincide with national elections," Maken said. He said the I-T tribunal order freezing Congress's funds is "an attack on democracy" as it has come just ahead of national elections and has left the principal Opposition party without funds to contest elections Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post on X, "Power drunk Modi Government has frozen the accounts of the country's largest Opposition party - Indian National Congress - just before the Lok Sabha elections." Congress also alleged that BJP was attempting to "murder democracy" and drag the country to a "dictatorship raj". "An autocratic Modi Government is capturing democracy through extortion and financial terrorism," he had said earlier.*—PTI*

RaGa among 39 in Cong's 1st LS list

Tharoor filed from T'puram for 4th time

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will contest the Lok Sabha polls from Kerala's Wayanad once again as the party announced its first list of 39 candidates on Friday.

Former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel has been fielded by the party from Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh, AICC general secretary KC Venugopal from Alappuzha (Kerala) and Shashi Tharoor renominated from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala.However, the party has denied ticket to sitting MP TN Prathapan from the Thrissur, while Venugopal will contest from the lone seat that the Congress lost last time. Tharoor will be contesting from Thiruvanathapuram for the fourth time.

There are, however, only three women candidates among the first list of 39 candidates. Among the candidates, six are from Chhattisgarh, seven from Karnataka, 16 from Kerala, four from Telangana, two from Meghalaya and one each from Sikkim, Nagaland, Tripura and Lakshadweep.

Among the candidates declared by the party after the CEC cleared it, include Bhupesh Baghel from Rajnandgaon, Shivkumar Dahariya from Jangir-Champa (SC), Jyotsana Mahant from Korba, Tamradhwaj Sahu from Mahasamund, Rajendra Sahu from Durg, Vikas Upadhyay from Raipur (all from Chhattisgarh).

In Kerala, Rajmohan Unnithan from Kasaragod, K Sudhakaran from Kannur, Shafi Parambil from Vadakara, MK Raghavan from Kozhikode, VK Sreekandan from Palakkad, Ramya Haridas from Alathur (SC), K Muraleedharan from Thrissur, Benny Behanan from Chalakudy, Hibi Eden from Ernakulam, Dean Kuriakose from Idukki, party's chief whip in Lok Sabha Kodikunnil Suresh from Mavelikkara (SC), Anto Antony from Pathanamthitta, Adoor Prakash from Attingal and Shashi Tharoor has been renominated from his Thiruvananthapuram constituency. In Telangana, party has fielded Suresh Shetkar from Zahirabad, Raghuveer Kunduru from Nalgonda, Challa Vamshi Chand Reddy from Mahbubnagar and Balram Naik Porika from Mahabubabad (ST). *—PTI*

DK Suresh, Geetha star in K'taka list

Cong released 7 names for K'taka in 1st list

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Geetha Shivarajkumar **PHOTO: PTI**

DK Suresh **PHOTO: PTI**

DK Suresh (Bengaluru Rural) and Kannada actor Shivarajkumar's wife Geetha Shivarajkumar (Shivamogga) figure in the first list of seven candidates in Karnataka announced on Friday by Congress for the coming Lok Sabha elections.

A three-time MP, Suresh is the brother of Congress Chief DK Shivakumar and is the sitting member from Bengaluru Rural. He was the only Congress candidate to win in the 2019 general elections in the State.

The other five candidates are: HR Algur (Vijayapura), Anandswamy Gaddadevar math (Haveri), SP Muddahanumegowda (Tumakuru), Venkatara mane Gowda (Mandya) and Shreyas M Patel (Hassan).

The party naming Geetha Shivarajkumar for the Shivamogga seat seems to have set the stage for an interesting battle in the home district of BJP veteran BS Yediyurappa.

Geetha, daughter of former chief minister late S Bangarappa, contested the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in Shivamogga on a JD(S) ticket and lost to Yediyurappa.

The seat is currently held by Yediyurappa's son, BY Raghavendra.

Geetha, sister of Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa and daughter-in- law of Kannada thespian late Rajkumar, joined Congress in April last year ahead of Assembly elections.

Venkataramane, also known as Star Chandru, is a contractor by profession.

Mandya seat is represented by Sumalatha Ambareesh, an independent backed by BJP. Congress had denied renomination to Muddahanumegowda in the 2019 elections to make way for Congress-JD(S) alliance candidate HD Deve Gowda who, however, lost the polls. Muddahanumegowda officially joined BJP in 2022 but kept a low profile. He returned to Congress fold only last month.

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar announced that more names would be finalized after the Screening Committee meeting on 11 March. *—PTI*

Sudha Murty **PHOTO: PTI**

SUDHA MURTY GETS NOMINATED FOR RAJYA SABHA

NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Engineer-turned-philanthropist and author Sudha Murty was nominated to Rajya Sabha on Friday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauding her contribution in diverse fields.

Murty, 73, the former chairperson of Infosys Foundation, is also renowned for her contribution to Kannada and English literature and is a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Bal Sahitya Puraskar, Padma Shri (2006) and Padma Bhushan (2023).

Murty, who was the first woman engineer to have worked with TELCO, is famously known to have provided the seed capital of Rs 10,000 from her emergency funds to her husband NR Narayana Murthy to start Infosys, which has a market cap of over 80-billion-dollars.

Her nomination to the Upper House of Parliament coincided with International Women's Day.

Murty holds a 0.83 percent stake in Infosys which at current prices is worth close to Rs 5,600 crore.

Modi asserted in a post on X that her presence in the Upper House is a powerful testament to "Nari Shakti" (women power), exemplifying the strength and potential of women in shaping the nation's destiny. "I am delighted that the President of India has nominated Sudha Murty Ji to the Rajya Sabha. Sudha Ji's contributions to diverse fields including social work, philanthropy and education have been immense and inspiring," the prime minister said and wished her a fruitful tenure. Murty thanked Modi and said she was grateful for the opportunity. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

₹5,000 fine for wasting drinking water in City

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

To combat the City's severe water shortage, Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) banned the use of potable water for non-essential activities such as car was hing, gardening and ornamental fountains. Malls and theatres must also limit water usage for essential purposes only, such as drinking, construction and sanitation.

Fines ranging from Rs 5,000 for the first offence and Rs 500 per day for subsequent ones will be imposed on the violators. Citizens are encouraged to report misuse through a dedicated call centre (1916).

However, enforcing the ban is a challenge. While authorities will patrol for offenders, independent houses with no access to treated wastewater for reuse are especially concerned. This crackdown follows the Bengaluru Urban administration's decision to cap water tanker prices at Rs 1,200 for a Rs 12,000-litre load within a 10km radius. However, residents in severely affected areas, particularly in the south-east and along Kanakapura Road, find this price cap insufficient. Water tanker suppliers claim most borewells in these regions are depleted. *—Salar News*

BJP, TDP ally to fight Assembly polls in Andhra

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Senior Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader and Rajya Sabha MP K Ravindra Kumar claimed on Friday that the BJP, the Jana Sena and his party have decided in principle to work together for upcoming polls and the modalities are being worked out.

A day after TDP President N Chandrababu Naidu held deliberations with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Chief JP Nadda, Kumar told PTI that preliminary discussions have taken place for the "purpose of an alliance" for the Lok Sabha and state Assembly polls, which are held simultaneously in Andhra Pradesh.

Sources said the number of seats the BJP will get in such an alliance remains a sticking point. Andhra Pradesh has 25 Lok Sabha and 175 Assembly constituencies.

The top leaders of the three parties may hold another round of discussions. *—PTI*

ARMY HEAD ABDUCTED FROM HOME IN MANIPUR

IMPHAL, 8 MARCH

A serving Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) of the Indian Army was abducted from his home in Manipur's Thoubal district by anti-social elements on Friday, officials said.

They said the JCO, identified as Konsam Kheda Singh, a resident of Charangpat Mamang Leikai, was on leave when some people barged into his home at 9am and bundled him in a vehicle and fled.

Though the cause of the abduction is not known, initial reports suggest that it was an extortion case as his family had received such threats in the past, the officials said.

On receiving information, a coordinated search operation has been launched by all security agencies to rescue the JCO.

This is the fourth incident since the commencement of the conflict in Manipur wherein soldiers while on leave, on duty or their relatives have been targeted for nefarious interests by inimical elements.

In September 2023, a former Assam Regiment soldier Serto Thangthang Kom was kidnapped and killed by an unidentified armed group from the valley. Two months later, an unidentified armed group kidnapped four people while they were travelling in an SUV from the hill district Churachandpur to Leimakhong, and killed them. *—PTI*

CELEBRATING MAHADEV

Devotees offer pooja at Shiva Temple on Mahashivratri festival in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Weeks before polls, LPG price cut by ₹100

New Delhi, 8 March

PHOTO: PTI

Weeks before general elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday announced a Rs 100 per cylinder cut in cooking gas LPG price to ease financial burden on households.

Non-subsidised cooking gas price will be cut to Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder in the national capital with effect from midnight of Friday/ Saturday, official sources said.

Prices vary from state to state depending on the incidence on local taxes.

The reduction has been made possible because of easing of international oil and gas prices, against which domestic fuel rates are benchmarked.

However, no change in petrol and diesel prices was announced. Petrol and diesel prices continue to be on freeze for a record 23 months now.

All LPG consumers in the country buy cooking gas at non-subsidised prices. Some like the poor women who got free connections under the Ujjwala Yojana, and consumers in remote and far-flung areas are paid a fixed amount of subsidy per refill in their bank accounts.

This is the second reduction in cooking gas prices in six months.

Rates were cut by Rs 200 per cylinder in late August ahead of assembly elections in five states, including Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

That revision brought down the prices from a nine-year high of Rs 1,103 per 14.2-kg cylinder to Rs 903 and now the rate has been cut to Rs 803. *—PTI*

'CREATE ON INDIA MOVEMENT'

In a first, Modi honours content creators

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Narendra Modi waves at gathering during the National Creators Awards 2024, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday urged content creators to start a 'Create on India Movement' and share stories with the world on India's culture, heritage, and traditions.

"Let us Create on India, Create for the World," Modi said after he presented the first ever National Creators' Awards at the Bharat Mandapam here.

"Let us together start a Create on India Movement. Let us share stories related to India, India's culture, India's heritage and traditions with the whole world. Let us tell our stories of India to everyone. Let us Create on India, Create for the World," Modi said addressing the gathering after presenting the awards.

"Create such content that, along with you, the country gets more likes. We must engage the global audience for it," he said.

Many people consider miniskirts to be a symbol of modernity. But if you go to Konark, you will see statues in the centuries-old temples sporting miniskirts and purses on their arms. This means thousands of years ago, even a sculptor had the knowledge of fashion in our country
-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

The Prime Minister wished women on International Women's Day and urged creators to increasingly make 'nari shakti' a part of their content. Creativity can even correct wrong perceptions, Modi said.

With the audience chanting "abki bar 400 paar," the Prime Minister said it is not Modi's guarantee but that of 140 crore Indians'.

He also urged content creators to make first time voters aware of their responsibility to cast their ballot.

Modi also urged content creators to raise awareness against use of drugs among youth. than 1.5 lakh nominations across 20 different categories were received for the awards. *—PTI*

SOCIAL MEDIA STARS HONOURED

Here are some famous creators who bagged the award

Ranveer Allahbadia: Disruptor of the Year

Known as Beer Biceps, he has 70L YouTube subscribers. He interviews prominent personalities across fields.

Gaurav Chaudhary: "Best Creator in Tech Category

Popularly known as Technical Guruji, he is the richest Indian tech YouTuber with a net worth of Rs 360 crore. His YouTube channel has 2.35 crore subscribers.

Keerthika Govindasamy Best Storyteller

Her channel Keerthi history has 19L YouTube subscribers. She talks about "real history of India" forgotten by education system.

Maithili Thakur: Cultural Ambassador of the Year

The 22-year-old is a singer with 44L YouTube subscribers. She is known for her singles 'Lamba Lolo' and 'Banno'

Drew Hicks: Best International Creator

He is an American content creator adept in Hindi and Bhojpuri, and creates viral videos for Instagram and YouTube. He has 9L Instagram followers

PHOTO: SALAR

PM to lay foundation stone of Hubballi Airport terminal

HUBBALLI, 8 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually lay the foundation stone for constructing a terminal building at Hubballi Airport on Sunday. Under an initiative of Airports Authority of India, Hubballi Airport is undergoing a development aimed at transforming it into a world-class aviation facility, said Manoj Shekaran, Managing Director of the airport. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, who engaged with Union Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airports Authority of India for the new terminal, will be present at the foundation-stone laying. Joshi had announced the allocation of Rs 350 crore for the project during the release of Dharwad Lok Sabha Constituency Development Watch Book. *—Salar News*

Women officers lead the way in Hubballi-Dharwad

DHARWAD, 8 MARCH

In a significant shift reflecting changing times, women are now at the forefront across administrative roles in Hubballi-Dharwad district. From governance to law enforcement, women officials are making their mark. Hubballi-Dharwad twin cities boast a female Mayor, with women leading the charge from the Commissioner of Police to Deputy Commissioner overseeing the entire district. Dharwad Deputy Commissioner Divya Prabhu, Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner Renuka Sukumar and Deputy Conservator of Forests Vrishni. Women also hold critical positions in education, healthcare and rural development. The presence of women extends beyond administrative roles, with KG Shanti serving as Principal District and Sessions Judge, while Sujatha Hasavimath and Nagaveni S preside over District Family Court. *—Salar News*

CAR Force holds parade led by all-women unit

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

On International Women's Day, Central Armed Reserve (CAR) Force headquarters in Bengaluru held a special service parade led by an all-women contingent. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic West) Anitha B Haddannanavar, IPS, commanded 10 platoons via a marchpast. The event also featured a demonstration of self-defence techniques by Rani Channamma Pade team consisting of female officers. Also, 126 women police personnel were recognised with appreciation letters for their outstanding contributions, a statement by Bengaluru City Police said. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Man held for raping 12-yr-old girl

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 8 MARCH

A 25-year-old man has been arrested for raping and impregnating his 12-year-old kin in Chikkaballapur district. The girl, studying in Class 7 at a government school, was six months' pregnant. The girl has been sent to a government girls' orphanage, run by Women and Child Welfare Department. A Pocso case has been registered against the man at Chikkaballapur Women's Police Station. *—Salar News*

Water tankers charge extra despite govt order

Residents allege helpline numbers are inaccessible

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Despite the government monitoring the water tanker prices, the residents of the City claimed that the rates remain the same and the helpline numbers (1916 and 1533) are inaccessible.

Kalkere resident Ganesh Manikyan said, "Despite the government saying the tanker rates will be reduced, the tankers we are hiring are charging the same price." He said, "I paid Rs 1,200 last week for 4,000 litres and two days back I paid Rs 1,500. The government issued the notice for the prices, but nobody is monitoring these tankers," he said.

Another City resident, Shivappa from Hosakerehalli said: "Our borewell is dried up and we have no water sources apart from these water tankers. If we file a complaint against these tankers who else will deliver us the water? Along with my fellow residents when we reached out to the 1916 helpline, the number was not responding."

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) set up a control room at its head office to resolve water supply issues in 110 villages under 35 of its wards. The helplines and control rooms for the water crisis are currently receiving 15-20 calls every two hours in each ward, especially from the outskirts of Bengaluru.

The areas such as RR Nagar, Honnehalli, Budigere and Sarjapura receive 20 calls regarding the water problem every hour. A nodal officer from Herohalli told Salar News "We have been getting 10 calls from one village and I have 15 villages under my ward. I have to ask residents to wait with patience since we have two tankers to supply in the villages in our ward," he said.

Kalkere resident Manikyan said: "I had paid Rs 20,000 to get the connection and pipe set for a water connection from BWSSB. It has been two years since then, I have not received any water from them." Areas under Mahadevapura zone, including Kadugodi, Byrathi, Hoodi, Whitefield, Varthur, Marathahalli, Bellandur and AECS Layout, are some of the worst-affected regions in terms of water supply. Other places facing supply disruptions are Doddabidarakallu, Lingadheeranahalli under the RR Nagar zone, Konanakunte, Vasanthapura under the Bommanahalli zone, Thanisandra, Amruthhalli under the Yelahanka zone, and Chikkasandra, Mallasandra under the Dasarahalli zone.

However, when Salar News tried contacting the helpline numbers 1533 and 1916, both were unreachable.—*Salar News*

BBMP sets up a control room at its head office to resolve water supply issues in 110 villages *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

- The areas such as RR Nagar, Honnehalli, Budigere and Sarjapura receive 20 calls regarding the water problem every hour.

SUMMER OF DESPAIR

Ullal Lake in Bengaluru dries up due to low rainfall and summer heat amid water scarcity in Karnataka *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Pontiff arrested on rape charges under POCSO Act

TUMAKURU, 8 MARCH

Balmanjunath Mahaswamiji of Vidya Chowdeshwari Peeth in Kunigal taluk of Tumakuru district has been arrested on charges of rape under Pocso Act following a complaint lodged by a 20-year-old woman with police.

The victim alleged that the pontiff sexually assaulted her on several occasions in the past five years even when she was a minor. According to the complaint, she first visited the mutt along with her father when she was 15.

They were looking for a cure for their health issues and they performed an "Ashtamangala prasnam". But taking advantage, he allegedly sexually assaulted her. Later, he also forced her to attend his video calls wherein he asked her to remove her clothes and "please" him, the complaint alleged.

"Based on a complaint we received from the victim, we registered a case under section 376 (rape), 354 (Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and other relevant section of the Protection of Children from the Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act as well as IT Act," a senior officer said. *—PTI*

The victim alleged that the pontiff sexually assaulted her on several occasions in the past five years *PHOTO: SALAR*

- Later, he also forced her to attend his video calls wherein he asked her to remove her clothes and "please" him, the complaint alleged.

WOMAN ARE LEADERS RIGHT FROM BIRTH: VP

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar celebrated International Women's Day with ISRO scientists, praising the space agency for its culture of gender diversity and inclusivity in decision-making and describing it as a befitting example to other organisations.

"India's 'Rocket Women' are leading us to the sky and beyond; they have broken ceilings for themselves and for our progress to go beyond benchmarks set earlier," he said while interacting with the scientific community at ISRO's UR Rao Satellite Centre here on Friday.

He also celebrated Women's Day with ISRO scientists and said: "A woman is always in a leadership role right from birth."

Commending the "indomitable spirit and contribution" of India's women scientists, Dhankhar said ISRO has exemplified the theme of International Women's Day 2024 - "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress". "It is worth noting that presently, there are about 20 per cent women in scientific and technical areas in ISRO and more than 500 women employees are in leadership roles at different levels in managerial and administrative domains, including leading a Centre," he said.

Describing it as an honour to be at "the heart of India's space exploration prowess" in Bengaluru, he congratulated the ISRO family, for their incredible talent and commitment to globally defining India's innovation and technological quantum jump.

Lauding numerous achievements of ISRO including Chandrayan-3 and the launching of several foreign satellites, the Vice-President underlined that ISRO has showcased our scientific prowess and technological expertise on the world stage while enhancing the quality of life for millions of our fellow citizens. *—PTI*

STEP UP AFTER SETBACK

Rameshwaram Cafe reopens week after blast

Rituals, attended by invitees, were held and kitchen operations resumed on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Just a week after a low-intensity blast rattled Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe, the beloved eatery is ready to welcome back customers from Saturday. Rituals, attended by invitees, were held and kitchen operations resumed on Friday.

Raghavendra Rao, the owner of Rameshwaram Café, said the blast had not and will not put them down. "In the past week, we have witnessed how the people of Bengaluru can come as one at a time of crisis like this. Come what may, we will always stay together and face the threats head-on. We are thankful to the government, our partners and PC Rao (Bruhat Bangalore Hotels Association President) for helping us to rise above these dark times and reopen the cafe so soon," Raghavendra told Salar News.

PC Rao said the incident is a stark reminder of the importance of vigilance. "However, it should not deter us. The Bengaluru hospitality industry is known for its warmth and welcoming spirit. We will not let such acts define us," he said.

Hotel owner Raghavendra said safety is their priority. "We've taken all precautions before reopening. We will be installing metal detectors and hiring additional security personnel to keep an eye on the premises. The cafe will also begin their day with the singing of the National Anthem, a symbolic gesture of unity and defiance," he said.

Looking back on the incident, Rao said they cooperated fully with the authorities. "We have provided all CCTV footage and information to help with the investigation. And surely the culprit will be brought to justice."

The air on Friday buzzed with a mix of relief and excitement as a homa, a traditional fire ceremony, blessed the premises. The reopening ceremony from 6pm on Friday, marked by the homa and the return of loyal customers, signifies a fresh start for the eatery.

The cafe expects a warm welcome from its loyal patrons from Saturday. "We love the people of Bengaluru. Without their love and support we would not have reached this stage," Raghavendra said. *—Salar News*

NIA TAKES TERROR SUSPECT, 3 MORE INTO CUSTODY

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken a terror suspect and three others into custody in connection with the bomb blast at Rameshwaram Cafe near Whitefield in the City.

NIA sleuths picked up Minhaj alias Mohammed Sulaiman 26, a cloth merchant from Ballari, along with Syed Sameer, Anas Iqbal Sheikh and Shaan Rehaman for questioning. Sulaiman was initially arrested on 18 December, 2023, and was suspected of leading an ISIS module in Ballari. NIA has got the custody of Sulaiman until 9 March. This comes seven days after the blast injured 10 people, including three cafe employees.

In December 2023, Sulaiman was arrested along with four people from Karnataka by NIA as they were suspected of plotting Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blasts. NIA registered a case against them on 14 December, 2023. *—Salar News*

Cafe owner Raghavendra Rao & Divya Raghavendra Rao *PHOTO: SALAR*

NIA files chargesheet in Shivamogga ISIS case

NEW DELHI, 8 MAR

The National Investigation Agency has filed a chargesheet against one more accused in the Shivamogga ISIS conspiracy case, related to writing of graffiti in Mangaluru in support of proscribed terrorist organisations, including ISIS and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), an official said on Friday.

In addition to the supplementary chargesheet against Arafath Ali, the federal anti-terror agency also filed charges against two others -- Mohammed Shariq and Maaz Muneer Ahmed -- in the case registered in 2022, the official said.

According to the NIA, Ali, who was arrested at the Indira Gandhi International airport in Delhi on his return from Kenya on 14 September last year, had allegedly radicalised and hired the other accused for writing the graffiti in January 2020.

The official said investigations revealed that it was on instructions from Taha and Shazeb that Ali had indoctrinated Shariq, Ahmed and others to write graffiti in support of the ISIS, LeT and Taliban at two places in Mangaluru.

The NIA had earlier filed one main and one supplementary chargesheets against nine accused, including Shariq and Ahmed. *—PTI*

NIA had earlier filed one main and one supplementary chargesheets against nine accused *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP SHORTLISTS 3 FOR BENGALURU RURAL LS SEAT

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

BJP has shortlisted three candidates for Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency for the upcoming polls, Leader of Opposition in Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka said on Friday.

"We have a strong candidate to contest from Bengaluru Rural. We have recommended three candidates. One among them will contest (on a BJP ticket)," the former Deputy Chief Minister said.

He said the one contesting from Bengaluru Rural will be a surprise candidate. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother D K Suresh is representing this constituency for three consecutive terms.

Ashoka said the list of BJP candidates for Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka would be released soon as the discussions on finalising nominees have reached final stages. Deliberations are continuing on some "problematic constituencies," he added. *—PTI*

'NARI SHAKTI' SAYS PM

RS nomination on Women's Day surprise: Sudha

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

The announcement of her nomination to Rajya Sabha was a double surprise as it came on Women's Day, philanthropist and author Sudha Murty said on Friday.

The former Chairperson of Infosys Foundation, the philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of Infosys, said she has never sought the position and had "absolutely no idea" why the government chose to nominate her. "I am grateful to our Prime Minister," Murty, who is currently on a visit to Thailand, told PTI over the phone.

On her role as a member of the Upper House, the wife of Infosys co-founder NR Narayana Murthy said, "I have to see what are the things...what I can do. This is a new area for me. So, I have to first sit and study and then I will be able to do it."

Sudha holds a 0.83 per cent stake in Infosys which at current prices is worth close to Rs 5,600 crore. She is the chairperson of the Murty Trust and has authored several books. According to the latest shareholding filed by Infosys with the BSE, she holds 3.45 crore shares of the company. At the last closing price of Rs 1,616.95 on the BSE, Murty's holding in Infosys is currently worth Rs 5,586.66 crore. Her husband Narayana Murthy owns 1.66 crore equity shares that are worth Rs 2,691 crore. Sudha, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2006 and Padma Bhushan in January this year, is also the mother-in-law of UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. While Padma Shri is the country's fourth-highest civilian award, Padma Bhushan is the second-highest civilian honour.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday morning took to the X to announce her nomination. "I am delighted that the President of India has nominated @SmtSudhaMurty Ji to the Rajya Sabha. Sudha Ji's contributions to diverse fields including social work, philanthropy and education have been immense and inspiring. Her presence in the Rajya Sabha is a powerful testament to our 'Nari Shakti', exemplifying the strength and potential of women in shaping our nation's destiny. Wishing her a fruitful Parliamentary tenure." *—PTI*

Sudha Murty says she has never sought the position and had no idea why the government chose to nominate her *PHOTO: PTI*

Govt approves projects worth ₹17,835 crore

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Karnataka government on Friday approved six new projects and eight additional investment proposals worth Rs 17,835.9 crore, with a potential to generate 27,000 jobs across the State.

State High-Level Clearance Committee (SHLCC), headed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at its meeting here, gave the nod to new projects worth Rs 8,220.05 crore, and additional investment ones worth Rs 9,615.85 crore, an officials said on Friday.

The new projects include Wistron Infocomm Manufacturing India's proposal to invest Rs 2,095 crore and provide employment to 21,723 in the State, officials said.

Other major proposals that received the government's green signal are: Air India Limited (Rs 1,750 crore investments), ICT Service Management Solutions (India) Private Limited (Rs 1,450 crore), STT Global Data Centres India Private Limited (Rs 1,352.3 crore) and Indian Cane Power Limited (Rs 1,078 crore), a statement said.

"Vijayapura, Kalaburagi, Ballari, and Belagavi districts of North Karnataka will attract new and additional investment of Rs 10,433.72 crore", it said. *—Salar News/PTI*

SC to hear SBI's plea on electoral bonds on 11 March

New Delhi, 8 March

A five-judge constitution bench of Supreme Court will hear on 11 March an application filed by State Bank of India (SBI) seeking extension of time till 30 June to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties before the scheme was scrapped last month. The bench, headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, will hear a separate plea which has sought initiation of contempt action against SBI alleging it "wilfully and deliberately" disobeyed order to submit details of the contributions made to political parties through electoral bonds to the Election Commission by 6 March. The bench also comprises justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. In a landmark verdict delivered on 15 February, a five-judge constitution bench had scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" and ordering disclosure by the Election Commission of the donors, the amount donated by them and the recipients by 13 March. *—PTI*

ED attaches sugar mill of Pawar's grandnephew

New Delhi, 8 March

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it has attached assets worth more than Rs 50 crore of a sugar mill owned by a company of Rohit Pawar, the grandnephew of NCP (SP) supremo Sharad Pawar. The action pertains to the money laundering investigation conducted by the federal agency in the alleged Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank (MSCB) scam. A total of 161.30 acres of land, plant, machinery and building of the Kannad Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Limited (Kannad SSK) located in Kannad village of Aurangabad district has been provisionally attached under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the ED said in a statement. The Kannad SSK is owned by Baramati Agro Ltd., a company of Rohit Pawar, who is also an MLA of the Sharad Pawar faction of the Nationalist Congress Party. *—PTI*

Cong to sound poll bugle on 17 March after yatra ends

Mumbai, 8 March

Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will conclude in Mumbai on March 17 with a rally at Shivaji Park in the city, Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole has said. The party will sound its poll bugle for upcoming Lok Sabha elections at the event, he said on Thursday. The yatra will enter Maharashtra from Nandurbar on 12 March and preparations for it are almost complete, said Patole. Patole said leaders from the Maha Vikas Aghadi, comprising the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP group led by Sharad Pawar, will attend the event. Congress leaders on Thursday held a review meeting in the presence of state in-charge Ramesh Chennithala. Patole said the BJP is "stealing leaders from other parties as it does not have competent candidates of its own". *—PTI*

BJP MLA booked for misbehaving with official

Dehradun, 8 March

An FIR has been lodged against BJP MLA Mahesh Jeena and four unidentified people for allegedly misbehaving with Dehradun Municipal Commissioner Gaurav Kumar and threatening him recently. The alleged incident had led to a strike by municipal corporation employees in the town. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has also directed Garhwal Commissioner Vinay Shankar Pandey to conduct a probe into the alleged incident and submit his report to the government in 15 days. IAS association of Uttarakhand on Thursday issued a statement condemning the alleged incident. It alleged that the MLA, with four of his aides, created a ruckus at the municipal corporation office in Dehradun on 5 March over the allocation of a tender. A purported video of the incident has gone viral. *—PTI*

BJD, BJP leaders unsure about retaining seats

Naveen Patnaik's colleagues will meet BJP top brass

BHUBANESWAR, 8 MARCH

After the ruling BJD and opposition BJP held separate meetings to discuss the possibility of forging an alliance before the upcoming elections for the Lok Sabha and state assembly, none of the parties are forthcoming about whether the parties would contest together after more than a decade.

Odisha Chief Minister and BJD President Naveen Patnaik on Thursday evening sent his close aide VK Pandian and the party's organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das to New Delhi for a discussion with the BJP top brass.

Even very senior leaders of the BJD were not sure whether they could contest from their existing seats, he said, adding that the party's electoral alliance was broken exactly 15 years ago on 8 March, 2009, following the BJP's demand for more seats.

Though both parties have so far agreed on principle to go for alliance, the seat sharing between the two parties is yet to be finalised.

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik with Prime Minister Narendra Modi *PHOTO: PTI*

BJD insiders said that the ruling party, which has 114 members in the 147-member Odisha Assembly, would like to retain its seats in the alliance while BJP has been demanding 55 seats.

While BJD wants at least 112 assembly seats leaving the remaining 35 for the BJP, it has not been accepted by BJP leaders.

The BJP, which has eight MPs in the Lok Sabha from Odisha, in turn, has been demanding 14 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats in the state. But the BJD is ready to concede only 10, sources said. "Whatever decision our central and state leadership take, we will abide by that," Lekhasree Samantsinghar, Odisha BJP's vice-president, said adding that the entire BJP state leadership including its president Manmohan Samal has been camping in Delhi.

When Janata Dal was split in 1998, Patnaik formed his own party and joined the Vajpayee-led BJP government, as the steel and mines minister.

The two parties fought assembly polls together for the first time in 2000 and again in 2004. *—PTI*

KAZIRANGA TRIP TODAY

PM in Assam as Oppn protests against CAA

TEZPUR/ GUWAHATI, 8 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Assam on Friday on a two-day visit, during which he will inaugurate and lay the foundation of projects worth Rs 18,000 crore.

Modi then flew to Panbari in Kaziranga in a helicopter, with Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and state Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, along with Sarma and others, once again extended their welcome to the Prime Minister as he landed there.

He undertook the last leg of his journey of about 15kms from the Panbari helipad to the Police Guest House near Central Kohora Range in Kaziranga National Park by road.

Traditional performances of Bihu and other folk songs and dances were presented along the route, with Modi praising it with a post on X.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma *PHOTO:ANI*

He will return to Jorhat in the afternoon and inaugurate the 125-ft high 'Statue of Valour' of legendary Ahom general Lachit Barphukan.

Opposition protest against CAA

Ahead of Modi's arrival, Opposition parties staged a protest in Kaliabor in Nagaon district against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). The sit-in by the 16-member United Opposition Forum, Assam (UOFA) was held near Kaziranga, where Modi is scheduled to spend the night after reaching the state in the afternoon. *—PTI*

LS polls: DMK finalises seat-sharing with allies

CHENNAI, 8 MARCH

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu on Friday finalised seat-sharing agreements with allies VCK and MDMK, repeating the 2019 pact with both parties.

While Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) was allotted two seats, both reserved constituencies, Vaiko-led MDMK was given one by the alliance's lead partner.

The founders of VCK and MDMK, Thol Thirumavalavan and Vaiko, respectively, finalised and signed the seat-sharing agreement with DMK President and Chief Minister MK Stalin at the ruling party headquarters, Anna Arivalayam.

PHOTO:PTI

Thirumavalavan said that the party will contest from Chidambaram and Villupuram, the two seats it represents in the current Lok Sabha. Thirumavalavan was elected from Chidambaram five years ago.

The party had sought at least three seats, including a general category one, but settled for two reserved constituencies considering the political situation in Tamil Nadu and India and keeping in mind the need to ensure the DMK -led alliance wins this time also, VCK leader said.

The party will contest from its own symbol, the earthen pot, and has requested the Election Commission to allot it a general symbol as it would be fielding its nominees from around 15 seats in Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana as well, he said. DMK leads the multi-party Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA) in Tamil Nadu and had swept the 2019 polls, winning 38 out of the 39 LS seats in the state, besides the lone Puducherry segment. *—PTI*

AAP launches LS poll campaign

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal along with his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann launched the party's Lok Sabha poll campaign on Friday with the slogan 'Sansad mein bhi Kejriwal, to Dilli hogi aur khush haal'.

The campaign was launched in the presence of other party leaders and workers from the Aam Aadmi Party headquarters on DDU Marg.

"Our slogan is 'Sansad mein bhi Kejriwal, to Dilli hogi aur khush haal' (Delhi will be more prosperous with Kejriwal in Parliament)," he said.

Kejriwal said BJP-led central government through Delhi Lt Governor Stalls every project launched by AAP government and urged the people to "strengthen" him by sending all seven opposition candidates to Parliament.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in New Delhi on Friday *PHOTO:ANI*

"They hate you because you elected and brought an ordinary man to power in Delhi. They demolished Mohalla Clinics with bulldozers, they stopped door-to-door ration delivery scheme, tests, and medicines in hospitals," he alleged.

AAP workers will distribute pamphlets describing work done by the party's governments during campaigning for the elections, he said.

AAP will fight the general election in collaboration with INDIA bloc partner Congress under a seat-sharing arrangement it has struck with it in Delhi, Gujarat, and Haryana.

AAP will contest four of the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi and Congress will field its candidates on the remaining three. *—PTI*

Mann wanted to join Cong, says Sidhu

Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu has claimed that Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had approached him once expressing his readiness to join the party. Sidhu said this during an interview with a media outlet when asked about rumours that he may join the BJP and whether the party had approached him. There was no response from Mann.

S Jaishankar with Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida *PHOTO: ANI*

'Global South believes in India not China'

TOKYO, 8 MARCH

Highlighting India's leadership in the Global South, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said the 125 countries of the platform placed their trust in India and not in China which skipped the two meetings convened by India last year to listen to their concerns.

Addressing the Nikkei Forum on the India-Japan partnership here, India's top diplomat said that countries of the Global South feel for each other on several issues.

"On a lot of issues, these countries feel for each other. The feeling has been intensified by COVID because many countries of the Global South felt that they were the last in the line to get the vaccine. They even felt at the time when India became G20 President that their concerns were not even on the agenda of the G20.

Within Asia and Africa, Global South is very popular in those continents. They know exactly what is happening, who's speaking up for them, and how their issues are getting on the table.

The ties between India and China nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

On the semiconductor side, this is the industry of the future. This is where the jobs will grow. We've had companies from abroad actually employ people in India," he said. *—PTI*

NITISH IN LONDON

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar visits Science Museum, in London, United Kingdom, on Friday. He is on a visit to the UK for five days *—PTI PHOTO*

Nagaland bandh over separate state

KOHIMA, 8 MARCH

A 12-hour bandh was enforced in the six districts of eastern Nagaland on Friday, demanding a separate state. The bandh was called by the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) along with its tribal bodies and frontal organisations, demanding a separate state carved out with the six districts in the eastern part of the state. The organisations declared a "public emergency" on Tuesday, stating that it would not allow any political party to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls. Vehicles remained off the roads, markets were shut, institutions and government offices were closed in Mon, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire, Noklak and Shamator districts. These districts are mainly inhabited by the tribes of Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Phom, Sangtam, Tikhir and Yimkhiung. During the bandh, which began at 6 am and continued till 6 pm, the districts wore a deserted look. —PTI

CBI searches Shahjahan's house

KOLKATA, 8 MARCH

CBI sleuths on Friday searched the residence of suspended TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh in Sandeshkhali in connection with its probe into an attack on an ED team in the area. Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) also visited areas near his house in Akunchipara locality of Sarberia to collect evidence in connection with the attack.

Sheikh, who has been suspended from the ruling Trinamool Congress, was arrested in a case related to a mob attack on ED officials at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal on 5 January when the central agency had gone to search his premises in connection with an alleged ration distribution scam.

A large contingent of central forces was deployed in the area for protection of the sleuths of the central agencies, the officials said.

CBI officials opened the seal placed on Sheikh's home by ED to enter the premises. They are also conducting videography and mapping the area for their investigation.

Sheikh, along with his aides Shiba Prasad Hazra, Uttam Sardar and others, were accused of sexual abuse and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali.

After being on the run for 55 days, Sheikh was nabbed on 29 February in Minakhan area, around 30km away from the island of Sandeshkhali on the outskirts of Sunderbans.

The CBI got his custody from the West Bengal Criminal Investigation Department (CID). *—PTI*

CBI officials take Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan from Bhavani Bhawan (West Bengal Police headquarters), in Kolkata, Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

'BJP HATAO, BETI BACHAO': CONG ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

On International Women's Day, Congress on Friday said women are demanding answers to questions such as why Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not visited Manipur and is "silent" on allegations of sexual harassment by women wrestlers against a BJP MP.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said it is International Women's Day today and "we don't expect the prime minister to do anything beyond paying salutary tributes to women".

"Nevertheless, here are some key questions that women across the country are asking him: Manipur has been in a state of virtual civil war since last year, and women have been among the most affected victims. Videos have emerged of women being assaulted and paraded naked - in a state that is experiencing a double-anyay regime of BJP in the state and the Centre. Why has the Prime Minister not even bothered to visit the state?" he said in a post on X. What is the his stance on this issue and does Modi consider Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh a member of 'Modi ka Parivar', the Congress leader asked. *—PTI*

AMID CRISIS

Centre rejects Kerala's request for Rs 19,370 cr

NEW DELHI/T'PURAM, 8 MARCH

The Centre informed Kerala on Friday that it could not agree to the state's demand for borrowing an additional amount of Rs 19,370 crore.

This was conveyed by the union finance secretary to a team of officials from Kerala led by Chief Secretary V Venu during their meeting in New Delhi.

Talking to reporters, Venu said they met the central government officials as per the directions of the Supreme Court and placed a request before them seeking to borrow Rs 19,370 crore.

He said the reasons for the additional amount sought for the state were presented before the apex court during the hearing.

"Our request was examined by the union finance secretary. However, he was not ready to agree to it," Venu said.

A state finance ministry source said that the state was indeed eligible for borrowing an additional amount.

"Our request to the central government was to rectify an error in the calculation of the borrowing space allocated to the state of Kerala. The state has accepted the calculation based on principles endorsed by the central government.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chief Minister of Kerala Pinarayi Vijayan *PHOTO: PTI*

"However, it was discovered that the borrowing space allotted to the state government was erroneously reduced by the central government. The request from the state government today was to rectify this mistake," the source told PTI.

The state government has said that it was eligible for Rs 13,000 crore this year.

The apex court made the observation while it was hearing a suit filed by the Kerala government accusing the Union of India of interfering in the exercise of its "exclusive, autonomous and plenary powers" to regulate the state's finances by imposing a ceiling on borrowing.

The dialogue between the Centre and the state must not stop merely because of the pending suit, the court had said while stressing on the need to resolve the issue. *—PTI*

Father stabs gym trainer son hours before wedding

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

A 29-year-old gym trainer was allegedly stabbed to death by his father in South Delhi on Wednesday night, officials said. According to the Delhi Police, Gaurav Singhal was stabbed in the national capital just a day ahead of his wedding on Thursday."Gaurav Singhal's father killed his son and has been taken into custody. Initial investigation revealed that he was stabbed 15 times. His father was missing after the murder," the police said on Thursday. During the probe, it came to light that the father and son did not have a cordial relationship."The accused has also told the Police that he has no regrets and he should have done it earlier," police said. The injured was rushed to the Max Hospital where he was declared dead by the doctors, said the police. *—ANI*

Bichom becomes 27th district of Arunachal Pradesh

ITANAGAR, 8 MARCH

Bichom, carved out of West and East Kameng, became the 27th district of Arunachal Pradesh. Chief Minister Pema Khandu inaugurated the district and laid the foundation of its headquarters at Napangphung on Thursday, an official communiqué said. He also handed over responsibilities to Deputy Commissioner Akriti Sagar and Superintendent of Police Sudhanshu Dhama. The Chief Minister said that infrastructure will be created for the new district headquarters and all assets transferred to Bichom district from East Kameng will be replaced with new ones.*—PTI*

Kerala unveils first AI teacher in school

NEW DELHI, 7 MARCH

"What is the most expensive thing in the world," was a question asked by a student from the KTCT Higher Secondary School in Kallambalam here loudly, even as a humanoid draped in a saree listened attentively. A necklace on the humanoid changed colour from green to orange, and it shook its head before giving out the answer with informative details as other children curiously listened. This silk saree-draped humanoid is 'Iris', the first AI teacher unveiled in Kerala. A disturbed network connection and the chatter from the children often slowed down Iris as it tried to catch the noises, presuming them to be questions asked to 'her'. And when there were too many noises, Iris took time to process the question. But when the hall was silent and a student asked a question, either from their syllabus or anything under the sun, Iris gave out the answer in no time.*—PTI*

Indian troops to exit Maldives as China gains foothold

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

India is set to pull its first batch of military personnel from the Maldives on Sunday as the island nation moves closer to China. The phased withdrawal of about 80 Indian troops must meet a May deadline set by President Mohamed Muizzu, who is widely seen to be pro-China.

India has said its military personnel were stationed in the Maldives to maintain and operate two rescue and reconnaissance helicopters and a small aircraft it had donated years ago. Removing Indian troops was an election promise made by Muizzu, who came to power in November.

India has long wielded influence over the Maldives, whose strategic location in its backyard allowed it to monitor a crucial part of the Indian Ocean. But the relationship between the countries has soured over the past few months, partly due to Muizzu's strong rhetoric against Delhi. It's a gap China is looking to exploit as the Asian powers jostle for influence in the region.

Even then, Delhi and Male (the capital of the Maldives) managed to agree that Indian civilian technical staff would replace military troops to operate the aircraft - the first team has already reached the islands.

"The aircraft will remain in the Maldives, and Indian [civilian] personnel will continue to be there to maintain them. So both sides seem to have reached a compromise," says Shyam Saran, a former Indian foreign secretary.

India has long wielded influence over the Maldives, whose location allowed it to monitor part of Indian Ocean *PHOTO: BBC*

Some in the Maldives see the replacement of troops by civilians as a climbdown by Muizzu after his high-voltage 'India Out' campaign.

Some analysts warn that the Maldives, a nation of just over half a million people, faces the risk of being caught up in the Asian power rivalry.

China has loaned more than a billion dollars to the Maldives over the years, mostly for infrastructure and economic development.

- Some analysts warn that the Maldives, a nation of just over half a million people, faces the risk of being caught up in the Asian power rivalry

Both Beijing and Male elevated their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership in January when Muizzu went to China on a state visit - he is yet to visit India, unlike previous Maldivian leaders.Earlier this week, the Maldivian government signed a "military assistance" agreement with China that has caused some concern in Delhi.

The Maldivian defence ministry said the agreement was "gratis" (without payment) without providing more details. But addressing a public meeting on Tuesday, Muizzu said China would offer non-lethal weapons for free as well as train the Maldivian security forces (both India and the US have trained the Maldivian military so far).

"This is unprecedented. It's the first time the Maldives has signed a defence agreement with Beijing to provide military assistance," Azim Zahir, a Maldivian political analyst, told the BBC.

"We knew that Muizzu would forge closer ties with China in terms of investment and capital, but no one expected him to go to this extent," he said.

But Beijing denies having any long-term military plans in the Maldives.

"It's a normal relationship between two countries. If China wants to have a military presence in the Indian Ocean, maybe it has better choices than the Maldives," says Long Xingchun, president of the Chengdu Institute of World Affairs think-tank.

Despite Beijing's assurances, many believe that China is moving swiftly to take advantage as the previous government, led by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, had an "India-first" approach.

During his election campaign, Muizzu had accused the previous administration of not disclosing the fine print of Male's agreements with Delhi.

He now faces similar criticism. *—BBC News*

2 Russia agents under scanner for sending Indians to war

The agency alleged that accused lured Indian men on pretext of jobs

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

"Two Russia-based agents involved in the human-trafficking network that pushed Indians into the Ukraine war zone are under the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) scanner," officials said on 8 March.

"Christina and Moinuddin Chippa, a resident of Rajasthan, are based in Russia and were facilitating the trafficking of Indian youth to Russia by offering them lucrative job opportunities there," officials said.

"The Central probe agency's First Information Report (FIR) has listed 17 other Visa consultancy companies, their owners and agents spread across India," they said.

The agency has booked them under Indian Penal Code Sections related to criminal conspiracy, cheating and human trafficking. The CBI has alleged that the accused people through their agents trafficked Indian nationals to Russia on the pretext of getting jobs related to the Russian Army, security guards, helpers, better life, and education and a huge amount was charged from these people illegally.

The Central probe agency's First Information Report has listed 17 other Visa consultancy companies *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

- The agency has booked them under Indian Penal Code Sections related to criminal conspiracy, cheating and human trafficking

The agents also duped students by providing them admission to dubious private Universities in Russia instead of government or public Universities by offering discounted fees, and visa extensions and ultimately leaving them "at the mercy" of local agents. Once these aspirants reached Russia their passports were seized by the agents and were forced to join army. *—PTI*

India busts network trafficking people to Russia

New Delhi, 8 March

India's federal investigation agency says it has busted a network of agents sending people to war-torn Russia under the pretext of giving them jobs.The network stretches across several states and about 35 people have fallen victims to the racket, the agency said. This comes after two Indians, who were duped into traveling to Russia, were killed in the war.The CBI said in a statement that the traffickers were operating under an "organised network".It said that agents were using YouTube and their local contacts to lure "gullible" youth to travel to Russia by promising them "lucrative jobs".Earlier, a man from Uttar Pradesh living in Moscow had told the BBC that he had been lured to Russia by a YouTube channel, promising a monthly salary of 150,000 rupees ($1813; £1,415).

The agency has filed cases against several private visa consultancy firms and agents, conducting searches at 13 locations, including Delhi and Mumbai. *—BBC News*

G4 MODEL

India presents proposal to reform UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, 8 MARCH

The G4 model notes that the current composition of the Security Council, with its "glaring under-representation and un-representation" of key regions in both categories of membership, is "detrimental" to its legitimacy and effectiveness. It stressed that the Council's inability to address critical conflicts and maintain international peace and security underscores the urgent need for reform.

"Any reform that does not address the lack of representation, particularly in the permanent category, would only exacerbate the current imbalances in the Council's composition and render it ill-equipped to address today's international challenges," she said.

Kamboj highlighted that it is important to note that the G4 model "does not specify" which member states will occupy the new permanent seats. "This decision will be made by the General Assembly in a democratic and inclusive election."She told the UN membership that the world has undergone a sea change since 1945 and the new realities need to be reflected in the permanent membership. "Any proposal that does not address the issue of representation of the Global South, including Africa, Asia and Latin America, in the permanent category does a grave injustice to the aspirations of developing countries for equality."The G4 model offered flexibility on the veto, an issue that has been a contentious topic among member states as they try to move the needle forward on the reform process that has moved at a snail's pace over the years."While the new permanent members would, have the same responsibilities as current permanent members, they shall not exercise the veto until a decision on the matter has been taken" Kamboj said. *—PTI*

WOMEN LEAD

Women take charge of Ranchi train

RANCHI, 8 MARCH

A 16-member all-women crew operated the Ranchi-Tori passenger train on the occasion of International Women's Day on Friday, an official said. The team comprised the loco-pilot, assistant loco-pilot, train manager, eight ticket checkers and five personnel of the Railway Protection Force (RPF), he said. The Ranchi division of the South Eastern Railway made arrangements to honour women and their contribution.—PTI

Indian Armed Forces personnel during a maiden all-women maritime surveillance mission, that was undertaken by the Andaman & Nicobar Command on the 40th anniversary of INAS 318 and Women's day on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Women protect Kaziranga

KAZIRANGA, 8 MARCH

Members of an all-woman anti-poaching team are at the frontline of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve to protect and conserve its wildlife and bio-diversity.The 'King Cobra Camp' in the park's Eastern Range of Agoratoli has six members, and it began functioning in 2023. *—PTI*

Army to have 2 sports companies

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

In sync with the national vision of "women empowerment" & demonstration of "Nari Shakti", the Indian Army is raising two Army Girls Sports Companies (AGSC) in a phased manner. The AGSC will train young girls from all parts of the country in Shooting, Archery, Athletics, Boxing & Weightlifting. To identify young talent, provide them with education apart from administrativerequirements. *—PTI*

Puducherry hit due to bandh over girl's rape

PUDUCHERRY, 8 MARCH

Several parties of Puducherry that are part of the INDIA bloc and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK) state unit held protests on Friday as part of their call for a dawn-to-dusk bandh to condemn the brutal sexual assault and murder of a girl.

The 12-hour bandh called by opposition AIADMK and the INDIA bloc condemned the failure of the Puducherry government in preventing the murder impacted normal life.

They demanded a strong punishment for the culprits involved in the murder of the nine-year-old girl.

Commercial and trade establishments and shops across the state of Puducherry are closed due to this total blockade. All the commercial establishments in Anna Road, Gandhi Veedi, Nehru Veedi etc. which are known as Vartha Dal are closed. Also, no buses are running in Puducherry state.

Protests have erupted in Puducherry after the discovery of a nine-year-old girl's body, in a drain near her house three days after she had been reported missing. This crime led to a wave of public anger in the Union Territory.

Police have arrested two people in connection with the case and a special investigation team (SIT) has been formed

Puducherry Lieutenant Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan also visited the family.

The LG consoled the family members. Speaking to reporters, she said that a fast-track special court would be set up to try the case *—ANI*

16 kids suffer burns after electrocution at 'Shiv Barat'

BHOPAL, 8 MARCH

On the occasion of Mahashivratri, 16 children participating in 'Shiv Barat' here sustained burn injuries on Friday late morning after getting electrocuted. The children, aged 10-16 years, were electrocuted from a high-tension power line passing overhead in the Sakatoura area under the Kunhari police station. Two of the children sustained 100 and 50 per cent burn injuries, respectively, while the rest 12 sustained less than 50 per cent injuries, a senior police official said. All the injured were rushed to the MBS hospital in Kota. The mishap occurred around 11.30am-12pm on Friday when a procession of 'Shiv Barat' was marching through Kalibasti. *—PTI*

Murmu presents Prez's Standard to 45 Squadron

GHAZIABAD, 8 MARCH

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday presented the President's Standard and Colours to four Indian Air Force units which she termed a "historic occasion".

Two squadrons -- 45 Squadron and the 221 Squadron -- received the President's Standard while the 11 Base Repair Depot and 509 signal unit received the President's Colours at a ceremony held at the Hindan Air Force Station here.

This is the first time that four units of the IAF have received the President's Standard and Colours together, an official statement said.

The President's Standard and Colours is the highest military honour for any armed forces unit. The four units selected for the coveted awards have stellar contributions to the IAF's history, it said.

Four personnel, two of them carrying an encased Standard each, and the rest an encased Colour each, then placed them over a stack of drums in a nod to military traditions.Murmu arrived at Hindan Air Force Station in a special IAF aircraft, a spokesperson of the Indian Air Force said.

The President is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

The occasion coincided with the International Women's Day. After receiving the guard of honour, Murmu presented the President's Standard to the 45 Squadron and the 221 Squadron. *—PTI*

EXPERT SAYS

'Despite progress, gender issues still on margins'

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls, the discourse surrounding women's issues has garnered renewed attention with the slogan of 'Nari Shakti' but several activists are apprehensive that the core concerns of women may again get subdued in the broader economic and political debates.

There is a need for political parties to prioritise gender-sensitive policies, not merely as token gestures but as integral components of their core agendas, Poonam Muttreja, executive director of the Population Foundation of India (PFI) said, criticising the "marginalisation" of women's issues within the broader electoral discourse.

"To truly empower women and address their unique concerns, it is imperative that political parties and leaders integrate gender-sensitive policies into their core agendas and manifestoes as a priority.

The long-pending women's reservation bill was passed in Parliament last year *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

"This includes not only increasing women's representation in political spaces but also ensuring that their voices are heard and acted upon in decision-making processes," she said.

"We need more women in the Cabinet of ministers and other important government offices," she told PTI.

- Women's issues has garnered renewed attention with the slogan of 'Nari Shakti' but activists are apprehensive that the core concerns may again get subdued

The long-pending women's reservation bill was passed in Parliament last year, and that has given a glimmer of hope to the women.

Seema Bhaskaran, Gender Lead at NGO Transform Rural India, underscored the importance of political agency enhancement through measures like the Women's Reservation Bill.

She pointed to examples from other countries like Rwanda, where such legislation had led to significant strides in gender equality in politics.

"Rwanda's 2003 Constitution set a 30 per cent quota for women in elected positions, and 10 years later the country became the world's leader for gender equality in politics," she noted.

Dolly Verma, a sarpanch from Gaya in Bihar, said women from all walks of life might not have representatives in Parliament right away, but the Bill will support them in a real democracy.

"I have been in local governance as a woman sarpanch for the last two terms. I must say that leadership positions not only help women but also the society because women are great leaders," she said. *—PTI*

CELEBRATING LORD SHIVA

Artists perform during a cultural programme organised on the occasion of Mahashivratri in Dehradun on Friday ***PHOTO:PTI***

HOW DO MUSLIMS OBSERVE RAMADAN?

Ramadan is a time of charity, increased worship and good deeds ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Observant Muslims the world over will soon be united in a ritual of daily fasting from dawn to sunset as the Islamic holy month of Ramadan starts. For Muslims, it's a time of increased worship, charity and good deeds. Socially, it often brings families and friends together in festive gatherings around meals to break their fast. Ramadan is followed by the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

This year, Ramadan comes as the latest Israel-Hamas war has killed thousands of Palestinians, left much of Gaza in ruins and created a humanitarian catastrophe, with many Palestinians there, especially in the devastated northern region, scrambling for food to survive. Some Muslims have been brainstorming how to remain mindful of the Palestinians' plight during Ramadan, including through making donations, saying prayers or incorporating Palestinian traditional symbols in how they mark the holy month.

When is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar; the month cycles through the seasons.

The start of the month traditionally depends on the sighting of the crescent moon; this year, the first day is expected to be on or around March 11.

Muslim communities may start Ramadan on different days, due to declarations by multiple Islamic authorities around the globe on whether the crescent has been sighted or different methodologies used to determine the start of the month.

Why and how do muslims fast?

Fasting is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, along with the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, and pilgrimage.

It's regarded as an act of worship to attain God-conscious piety and one of submission to God. The devout see benefits including practicing self-restraint, cultivating gratitude, growing closer to God, and feeling for the poor and hungry.

The daily fast in Ramadan includes abstaining from all food and drink; not even a sip of water is allowed from dawn to sunset before breaking the fast in a meal known as "iftar" in Arabic. Those fasting are expected to also refrain from bad deeds, such as gossiping, and increase good deeds.

Charity is a hallmark of Ramadan. Among other ways of giving, many seek to provide iftar for the needy, distributing Ramadan boxes filled with pantry staples, handing out warm meals alongside such things as dates and juice or helping hold free communal meals.

Are there exemptions from fasting?

Yes. There are certain exemptions from fasting, such as for those who are unable to because of illness or travel. Those unable to fast due to being temporarily ill or traveling need to make up for the missed days of fasting later.

Traditions associated with ramadan

Muslims are ethnically and racially diverse and not all Ramadan traditions are rooted in religion. Some customs may transcend borders, while others can differ across cultures.

Many social rituals center on gathering and socializing after the daily fast. Some Muslims decorate their homes, put out Ramadan-themed tableware and centerpieces or throng to markets and Ramadan bazaars.

Ramadan's soundscape in Egypt has traditionally included the pre-dawn banging on drums by a "mesaharati" who roams neighborhoods, calling out to the faithful, sometimes by name, to awake them for the suhoor meal.

In various regions, some Muslims worry that the month is being commercialized, and that an emphasis on decorations, TV shows, outings or lavish iftar banquets, especially in the social media era, can detract from Ramadan's religious essence. People in Indonesia's deeply conservative Aceh province slaughter animals during Meugang festivities.

Hundreds of residents in Tangerang, a city just outside the capital of Jakarta, flock to the Cisadane River to wash their hair with rice straw shampoo and welcome the fasting month with a symbolic spiritual cleansing.

After evening prayers, many boys and girls across Sumatra island parade through the streets. They carry torches and play Islamic songs.

In India, home to more than 200 million Muslims making up a large minority group in the country, stalls lining many streets sell such things as dates, sweets and freshly cooked food. At night, some New Delhi neighborhoods become lively as Muslims head to mosques to attend prayers.

Some Indian Muslims also visit holy shrines dedicated to Sufi saints, which are decorated with lights and colorful flowers.

In the United States, home to a diverse, small but growing Muslim population, gathering at mosques and Islamic centers when possible for iftar meals and prayers provides many Muslim families with a sense of community. Some Muslims also organize or attend interfaith iftar meals.

Some U.S. retailers have started catering to Ramadan shoppers, selling such things as Ramadan-themed decor. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار بنگلور

Govt cracks down on sale of e-cigarettes

Noida police seized China-made e-cigarettes ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

In the wake of a successful seizure of Chinese-made e-cigarettes by Noida Police, Mothers Against Vaping, a united front of proactive and concerned mothers and experts, emphasised on the need for sustained vigilance against the threat of e-cigarettes.

Noida Police recently arrested smugglers and seized a significant quantity of Made in China e-cigarettes which were sourced from Nepal.

"We commend the government's efforts to restrict the spread of new-age gateway devices like e-cigarettes, vapes, etc, through a slew of seizures on banned products. We hope these sustained heightened vigilance initiatives by enforcement agencies continue as it is necessary to safeguard children and youth of our country from these banned products," the collective said in a statement.

In November 2023, a large consignment of e-cigarettes worth Rs 50 lakh coming from China was nabbed on the Khutar-Puranpur highway in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

Similarly, a seizure at Chennai airport in November last year involved the confiscation of 11,700 e-cigarettes worth Rs 3.5 crore coming from China.

The easy accessibility and glamorisation of these new-age gateway devices are luring youngsters into the trap of addictive behaviours, Dr Rajesh Gupta, Additional Director, Pulmonology and Critical Care, Fortis Healthcare, Noida, said.

"The actions taken by the police and the government are praiseworthy in terms of seizures and increased vigilance but at the same time, more needs to be done. While continued seizures are essential, there is an equally crucial need to raise awareness and emphasise the detrimental health effects of vaping," he said.

> **The actions taken by the police and the government are praiseworthy in terms of seizures and increased vigilance, emphasise the detrimental health effects of vaping.**
>
> —Dr. Rajesh Gupta, Additional Director, Fortis Healthcare

"Manufacturers of these devices are specifically targeting our youth, making it imperative to spread awareness that vaping is not cool and extremely harmful.

This message needs to permeate popular culture and one effective way to achieve this is by involving youth icons, celebrities and influencers as the faces of an anti-vaping movement," he added.

According to World Health Organisation, the region is home to 280 million smokeless tobacco users, constituting nearly 77 per cent of the global smokeless tobacco user population.

To curb the use of these new-age devices, efforts should address both the demand and supply sides, said Dr Bhavna Barmi, Clinical Psychologist and Founder, Happiness Studio.

She said the seizures target the supply side, but the government should also explore penalties for the use of these new-age gateway devices.

Implementing penalties under the PECA law for vaping and use of e-Cigarettes can instil fear among users and their parents, contributing to a reduction in the usage of these devices, said Dr Barmi.

Indian government has been proactive in banning e-cigarettes and has taken decisive action by prohibiting e-cigarettes and similar new-age gateway devices through the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarette Act (PECA) 2019.

Easy accessibility and glamorisation of these newage gateway devices are luring youngsters into the trap of addictive behaviors ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Why do young people have such poor mental health?

A survey shows the UK public believes social media to be a significant factor in poor youth mental health ***PHOTO:PIXABAY***

A recent report from think tank the Resolution Foundation has found that 34% of young people aged 18-24 in the UK have symptoms of a common mental disorder – the highest rate of any age group.

Mental health problems among young people are on the rise. An especially stark finding of the report is that 20 years ago, this age group was the least likely to have a common mental disorder.

The big question is why. As a psychologist researching young people's wellbeing, I believe that young people today face unprecedented pressures to excel academically, professionally and socially.

This pressure can manifest in various forms, including academic stress, performance anxiety and fear of failure.

Current societal difficulties, such as the cost of living crisis, will have further exacerbated these issues – as will the lasting impact of isolation and loss of valuable life experiences during the pandemic.

A new survey from King's College London and non-profit research group the Orygen Institute shows that a majority of the UK public thinks that young people today have a worse time finding a job and more difficulty affording things than previous generations.

Markers of success

Globalisation and technological advancements have transformed the job market, splitting jobs more starkly into high- or low-skilled occupations. This has led to greater emphasis on specialised skills and higher education.

Educational or career success – or failure – is now more visible than ever. The rise of social media has intensified the need to present a perfect image of success.

Logging into a social media account invariably brings an announcement about someone being promoted, starting a new job, or taking up an exciting opportunity.

This can potentially trigger negative feelings, particularly if a young person has been struggling to get a job or even an interview.

The King's College London and Orygen Institute survey found that social media is seen as a key driver in worsening mental health among the young.

The curated nature of social media feeds can create unrealistic standards of beauty, success and happiness, leading to feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem.

Increased time online and the pressure to maintain an online identity may also worsen feelings of inadequacy and isolation.

The pandemic exacerbated these issues by intensifying feelings of social isolation and uncertainty. Organisational closures and physical distancing requirements reduced social contact and support.

Research studies report mental health deterioration among children and teenagers as a result of Covid control measures, especially among those with preexisting vulnerabilities, such as socioeconomic disadvantage, neurodiversity or disability.

A high proportion of young people in the UK believe that many areas are worse for them compared to when their parents were their age; 78 per cent think they are less able to afford things and 76 per cent think mental health has worsened. This has the potential to lead to a sense of hopelessness.

Educational or career success – or failure – is now more visible than ever. The rise of social media has intensified the need to present a perfect image of success. Logging into a social media account invariably brings an announcement about someone being promoted, starting a new job, or taking up an exciting opportunity. This can potentially trigger negative feelings, particularly if a young person has been struggling to get a job or even an interview.

If young people view their future as gloomy and feel they can do nothing to change their prospects, they are less likely to engage in tasks and activities that can improve their situation.

Mental health awareness

The King's College and Orygen Institute survey found that 47% of people think mental health problems were just as common among young people in the past; they just weren't identified as such.

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing awareness and acceptance of mental health issues, leading to greater visibility and discourse.

This has helped reduce stigma and improve access to resources. But it has also created new challenges for young people navigating their mental health.

Increased awareness has empowered young people to seek help and speak out about their struggles.

On the other hand, the way mental health is discussed has created a sense of pressure to find ways to be mentally healthy and resilient, with a person individually responsible for their own mental wellbeing.

This pressure may be particularly challenging for young people who are struggling with difficult circumstances and associated mental health issues, leading to feelings of shame and self-blame.

All these factors are intertwined and difficult to isolate, meaning there is no simple solution.

But my advice to everyone, not only young people is, try to play an active part in each area of your life when you can, push yourself outside of your comfort zone, and make sure you celebrate the small wins. *—The Conversation*

6 of Lankan family die in Canada 'mass killing'

Toronto, 8 March

A 19-year-old student from Sri Lanka is accused of stabbing and killing six people he lived with, including a two-and-a-half-months-old baby girl and three other kids from a Sri Lankan family, Ottawa police said Thursday. Ottawa Police Chief Eric Stubbs said an "edged weapon" or "knife-like object" was used by the suspect Febrio De-Zoysa. He has been charged with six counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder. Mass killings are rare in Canada. Stubbs said the deceased are Sri Lankan nationals who recently came to Canada. He said they include a 35-year-old mother, a seven-year-old son, a four-year-old daughter, a two-year-old daughter and two and a half-months-old baby as well as a 40-year-old acquaintance of the family. The police chief said when the first officers arrived at the home the family's father was outside and screaming for someone to call 911. Police received two emergency calls at 10.52 pm. *—PTI*

UK ex-PM Theresa May to stand down as MP after 27 years

London, 8 March

Theresa May, who was the prime minister of Britain between 2016 and 2019, on Friday announced her exit from frontline politics after 27 years as a member of Parliament in the House of Commons. The 67-year-old, whose travails with getting a Brexit deal through Parliament in the wake of the June 2016 referendum ended in a forced exit from 10 Downing Street over four years ago, said she had taken the "difficult decision" to not contest in the next general election from her Maidenhead constituency in south-east England. She has been the Conservative MP for the Berkshire seat since 1997, having been elected seven times. The senior parliamentarian is often referred to as the "new Iron Lady" as the second female prime minister of the UK after Margaret Thatcher. *—PTI*

Iran is responsible for 'physical violence' in 2022 protest: UN

Dubai, 8 March

Iran is responsible for the "physical violence" that led to the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022 and sparked nationwide protests against the country's mandatory headscarf, or hijab, laws and its ruling theocracy, a UN fact-finding mission said on Friday. The stark pronouncement came in a wide-ranging initial report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by the Fact-Finding Mission on Iran. It also found that the Islamic Republic employed "unnecessary and disproportionate use of lethal force" to put down the demonstrations that erupted following Amini's death, and that Iranian security forces sexually assaulted detainees. The month-long security crackdown killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained. There was no immediate comment on the report from Iran. *—AP*

Rupert Murdoch set to be married for the 5th time

Melbourne, 8 March

Rupert Murdoch is engaged again -- this time to current girlfriend Elena Zhukova The former chairman of Fox and News Corps, 92, and the retired molecular biologist, 67, are taking their relationship to new heights as they prepare to tie the knot. On Thursday, reports circulated that Murdoch and Zhukova will wed this June — it will be the fifth time the media mogul has said "I do," and it is currently his sixth engagement. According to The New York Times, the media mogul and his bride-to-be began dating over the summer, and invitations for the wedding have already gone out. *—Courtesy, The People*

Gaza kids die due to malnutrition, starvation

Gazans are now eating weeds that crop up in empty lots

RAFAH, 8 MARCH

After months of warnings over the risk of famine in Gaza under Israel's bombardment, offensives and siege, children are starting to die.

Hunger is most acute in northern Gaza, which has been isolated by Israeli forces and has suffered long cutoffs of food supply deliveries. At least 20 people have died from malnutrition and dehydration at the north's Kamal Adwan and Shifa hospitals, according to the Health Ministry. Most of the dead are children including ones as old as 15 as well as a 72-year-old man.

Particularly vulnerable children are also beginning to succumb in the south, where access to aid is more regular.

At the Emirati Hospital in Rafah, 16 premature babies have died of malnutrition-related causes over the past five weeks, one of the senior doctors told The Associated Press.

Malnutrition is generally slow to bring death, striking children and the elderly first. Other factors can play a role. Underfed mothers have difficulty breastfeeding children. Diarrheal diseases, rampant in Gaza due to lack of clean water and sanitation, leave many unable to retain any of the calories they ingest, said Anuradha Narayan, a

Yazan al-Kafarna died of hunger and malnutrition in Gaza; Inset: A photo of Yazan looking healthy before the war started; Below: Legs of Gazan kids suffering from malnutrition *PHOTO: AL JAZEERA*

UNICEF child nutrition expert. Malnutrition weakens immune systems, sometimes leading to death from other diseases.

Israel largely shut off entry of food, water, medicine and other supplies after on 7 October.

UNRWA, the largest UN agency in Gaza, says Israel restricts some goods and imposes cumbersome inspections that slow entry. Also, distribution within Gaza has been crippled, UN officials say convoys are regularly turned back by Israeli forces, the military often refuses safe passage amid fighting, and aid is snatched off trucks by hungry Palestinians on route to drop-off points.

Desperation in the North

Conditions in the north, largely under Israeli control for months, have become desperate. Entire districts of Gaza City and surrounding areas have been reduced to rubble by Israeli forces. Still, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians remain.

Meat, milk, vegetables and fruit are nearly impossible to find, according to several residents who spoke to the AP. The few items in shops are random and sold at hugely inflated prices mainly nuts, snacks and spices. People have taken barrels of chocolate from bakeries and are selling tiny smears of it.

Most people eat a weed that crops up in empty lots, known as "khubaiza."

US TO SET UP TEMPORARY AID PORT FOR GAZA

WASHINGTON, 8 MARCH

President Joe Biden ordered the US military on Thursday to set up a temporary port off the coast of Gaza, joining international partners in trying to carve out a sea route to deliver food and other aid to desperate Palestinian civilians cut off by the Hamas-Israel war and by Israeli restrictions on humanitarian access by land.

While reiterating his support for Israel, Biden used the announcement and the bright spotlight of his State of the Union speech to renew months of US calls to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to change how he conducts the war, including by allowing in more aid to Gaza and doing more to protect humanitarian workers there.

Yazan al-Kafarna, 10, died Monday after almost a week of unsuccessful treatment in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah. Photos of the boy showed him extremely emaciated, with twig-like limbs and deep-sunk eyes in a face shrivelled to his skull. *—AP*

Gunmen abduct 287 pupils from Nigeria school

ABUJA, 8 MARCH

Gunmen attacked a school in Nigeria's northwest region Thursday and abducted at least 287 students, the head teacher told authorities, marking the second mass abduction in the West African nation in less than a week.

Abductions of students from schools in northern Nigeria are common and have become a source of concern since 2014 when Islamic extremists kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls in Borno state's Chibok village. In recent years, the abductions have been concentrated in northwestern and central regions, where dozens of armed groups often target villagers and travelers for huge ransoms.

Locals told The Associated Press the assailants on Thursday surrounded the government-owned school in Kaduna State's Kuriga town just as the pupils and students were about to start the school day at around 8 am.

No group claimed responsibility for Thursday's attack though blame fell on armed groups that mostly constitute herders who have been accused of carrying out violent attacks and kidnappings for ransom following decades-long pastoral conflict with host communities.

Security forces arrived later as a search operation widened, while community members and parents gathered to wait for news. The attack occurred days after more than 200 people, mostly women and children, were abducted by extremists in northeastern Nigeria.

Women, children and students are often targeted in the mass abductions in the conflict-hit northern region and many victims are released only after paying huge ransoms.

—AP

FRANCE SEALS RIGHT TO ABORTION IN ITS CONSTITUTION

PARIS, 8 MARCH

France's leadership will use a Napoleon-era press to seal the right to abortion into the country's constitution in a historic ceremony on Friday that's open to the public and designed to show support to women across the world on International Women's Day.

France is the first country to explicitly guarantee abortion rights in the national charter.

While abortion is a deeply divisive issue in the United States, it's legal in nearly all of Europe and overwhelmingly supported in France, where it's seen more as a question of public health and not politics. French legislators approved the constitutional amendment on Monday in a 780-72 vote that was backed by many far-right lawmakers.

Friday's ceremony, held on the cobblestones of Vendome Plaza in Paris, is a key event on a day focused on advancing women's rights globally. Marches, protests and conferences are being held from Jakarta, Indonesia, to Mexico City and beyond.

The French constitutional amendment has been hailed by women's rights advocates around the world, including places where women struggle to access birth control or maternal health care. French President Emmanuel Macron called it a direct result of the US Supreme Court ruling in 2022 rescinding long-held abortion rights. *—AP*

S KOREA-US ARMY TRAINING

N Korea's Kim guides artillery firing drill in range of Seoul

SEOUL, 8 MAR

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised artillery firing drills aimed at boosting combat readiness, state media reported Friday. This was days after his country vowed to take corresponding military steps against the ongoing South Korean-US military training that it regards as an invasion rehearsal.

Thursday's drills involved frontline artillery units, whose weapons place Seoul, the South Korean capital, in their striking range, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Kim said artillery units must "take the initiative with merciless and rapid strikes at the moment of their entry into an actual war," KCNA said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Friday that it had detected North Korea firing artillery into the waters off its west coast the previous day. It said South Korea will make a stern and overwhelming response in the event of provocations by North Korea.

North Korea's forward-deployed long-range artillery guns pose a serious security threat to Seoul, a city with 10 million people which is about 40 to 50 kilometres (25 to 30 miles) from the border with North Korea.

North Korea's Defence Ministry said Tuesday it would conduct unspecified "responsible military activities" in response to the annual South Korea-US military drills that began on Monday. Kim visited a western operational training ground on Wednesday and called for stronger war fighting capabilities.

The 11-day South Korean-US drills involve a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises. *—AP*

DRAGON BALL CREATOR AKIRA TORIYAMA DIES

TOKYO, 8 MARCH

The creator of Dragon Ball, one of the most influential and best-selling Japanese comics of all time, has died at 68.

Akira Toriyama suffered an acute subdural hematoma, a type of bleeding near the brain, his studio said Friday.

Dragon Ball is hugely popular around the world and the comic series has also spawned cartoon and film versions.

The Dragon Ball comic series debuted in 1984. It follows a boy named Son Goku in his quest to collect magical dragon balls to defend Earth against alien humanoids called Saiyans.

He died on 1 March and only his family and very few friends attended his funeral. Born in Nagoya, Japan in 1955, Toriyama

Akira Toriyam *PHOTO: X/ SUMITHANSD*

broke into the comic book world in the early 1980s with Dr. Slump, which tells the story of a little girl robot Arale and her scientist creator.

But Dragon Ball was his most famous work. To many fans, Son Goku's journey from a kid who fumbles his martial arts training to a high-flying hero who can shoot bolts of electricity from his hands mirrors their own struggles against self-doubt as they grew into adulthood. *—BBC News*

HIGHEST IN SOMALIA

UNICEF: 230M females are circumcised globally

CAIRO, 8 MARCH

Over 230 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation, most of whom live in Africa, according to a report issued on Friday by the United Nations children's agency.

In the last eight years, 30 million people have undergone the procedure, in which external genitalia are partially or fully removed, UNICEF estimated in the report released on International Women's Day.

The practice, incorrectly believed to control women's sexuality, can cause serious bleeding and even death.

Girls are subjected to the procedure at ages ranging

PHOTO: ANI

from infancy to adolescence. Long term, it can lead to urinary tract infections, menstrual problems, pain, decreased sexual satisfaction and childbirth complications, as well as depression, low self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Some 144 million women and girls have been through female genital mutilation in Africa alone, followed by Asia and the Middle East with 80 million and 6 million respectively, the report said. Somalia tops the list of countries is prevalent, with 99 percent of the female population between the ages of 15 and 49 having been circumcised.

Burkina Faso made the most significant progress, reducing the proportion of women between 15 and 49 who were circumcised from 80 per cent to 30 per cent over three decades.

The report also showed that four in every 10 survivors live in conflict-torn countries with high population growth rates. *—AP*

'AMERICA IS RISING'

US President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address, in Washington, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

'US revitalised ties with India amid China's rise'

WASHINGTON, 8 MARCH

The US has revitalised its partnership with its allies and nations such as India, Australia, South Korea and Japan, US President Joe Biden said on Thursday, amidst the rise of China, which he said is indulging in "unfair economic practices" and endangering peace across the Taiwan Strait.

Biden, 81, in his final State of the Union Address before a joint session of the US Congress, said the US wants competition with China, but not conflict.

Biden, seeking re-election in November, said America is in a stronger position to win the competition for the 21st Century against China.

China considers Taiwan as its breakaway province and insists it should be unified with the mainland, by force if necessary. Taiwan, however, sees itself as completely distinct from China.

China has been ramping up its military offensive against the self-ruled island of more than 23 million people, triggering global concerns including from the US. Multiple government websites of US government reported outage extending to 20 minutes as Biden delivered state of the union address. The websites are back online after a brief interruption. Reports suggest big government websites including DHS, ICE, FEMA and the Secret Service, reported outage. *—AP*

US soldier held for selling info to China

A US Army analyst has been arrested and charged with selling sensitive military secrets to a contact in China. Sgt Korbein Schultz was arrested on Thursday at Fort Campbell in Kentucky following an inquiry by the FBI and US Army counterintelligence. According to the charges, he was paid $42,000 in exchange for dozens of sensitive security records. Officials say the criminal conspiracy began in June 2022 and continued up until his arrest. Schultz is charged with conspiracy to obtain and disclose national defence information.

AI images show Trump with Black supporters

WASHINGTON, 8 MARCH

At first glance, showing former President Donald Trump surrounded by groups of Black people smiling and laughing seem nothing out of the ordinary, but a look closer is telling.

Odd lighting and too-perfect details provide clues to the fact they were all generated using artificial intelligence. The photos, which have not been linked to the Trump campaign, emerged as Trump seeks to win over Black voters who polls show remain loyal to President Joe Biden.

The fabricated images, highlighted in a recent BBC investigation, provide further evidence to support warnings that the use of AI-generated imagery will only increase as the November general election approaches. Experts said they highlight the danger that any group — Latinos, women, older male voters — could be targeted with lifelike images meant to mislead as well as demonstrate the need for regulation around the technology.

In a report published this week, researchers at the nonprofit Center for Countering Digital Hate used several popular AI programmes to show how easy it is to create realistic deepfakes that can fool voters. The researchers were able to generate images of Trump meeting with Russian operatives, Biden stuffing a ballot box and armed militia members at polling places, even though many of these AI programmes say they have rules to prohibit this kind of content. *—AP*

ENDS WAR NEUTRALITY

Sweden officially joins NATO

WASHINGTON, 8 MARCH

Sweden on Thursday formally joined NATO as the 32nd member of the transatlantic military alliance. This ends decades of post-World War II neutrality and centuries of broader non-alignment with major powers as security concerns in Europe have spiked following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

President Joe Biden congratulated Sweden on its admission and said it was a sign that Russian President Vladimir Putin's intervention in Ukraine had united, rather than divided, the alliance.

The Swedish flag will be raised outside the military organization's headquarters in Brussels on Monday. Stoltenberg underscored that the Nordic country "now enjoys the protection granted under Article 5, the ultimate guarantee of allies' freedom and security."

Antony Blinken accepts Sweden's instruments of accession Ulf Kristersson for its entry into NATO *PHOTO: PTI*

Article 5 of NATO's treaty obliges all members to come to the aid of an ally whose territory or security is under threat. It has only been activated once by the US after the 11 September, 2001, attacks and is the collective security guarantee that Sweden has sought since Russia invaded Ukraine. Sweden, along with Finland, which joined NATO last year, both abandoned the long-standing military neutrality that was a hallmark of the Nordic states' Cold War foreign policy after Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022. Sweden's membership had been held up due to objections by Turkey and Hungary.

Turkey expressed concern that Sweden was harboring and not taking enough action against Kurdish groups, and Hungary's populist President Viktor Orban has shown pro-Russian sentiment and not shared the alliance's determination to support Ukraine. *—AP*

US Bill forces TikTok to cut ties with China

WASHINGTON, 8 MARCH

A US congressional panel has approved a Bill that would force TikTok's China-based parent company to sell the app within six months or face a ban.

The measure, introduced by another House of Representatives committee and backed by the White House, cites national security concerns.

TikTok says the proposed legislation would hurt free speech and small businesses that rely the app.

It has urged its users to call members of Congress to voice their opposition.

The social media giant confirmed to BBC it had sent a notification urging TikTokers to "call your representative now" to urge them to vote against the

PHOTO: X

measure.

One congressional aide told the BBC their office had received dozens of calls.

Some phone lines had been overwhelmed, the New York Times reported, and a few of the callers appeared to be teenagers.

The Bill is expected to go to a full House floor vote next week. It has been proposed by a cross-party group of 20 lawmakers who form the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party. *—BBC News*

The Ayurveda Experience raises $27 million funding

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Direct-to-consumer (D2C) brand The Ayurveda Experience (TAE) on 8 March said it raised $27 million in a series C round led by Jungle Ventures, a Singapore-based VC firm, at a time when growth and late-stage funding deals in Indian startup ecosystem are few and far.In a statement, the e-commerce company said that it plans to use the new funds to deepen its brand presence and recognition in existing markets, ramp up customer engagement on its platform, invest into product research and development, and scale new avenues for distribution. Founded by Rishabh Chopra in 2010, TAE operates in the cross-border, D2C space in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Beauty, and Personal Care industry. *—PTI*

Now, pay Nepalese merchants using UPI

MUMBAI, 8 MARCH

NPCI on Friday announced that Unified Payment Interface (UPI) is now live in neighbouring Nepal. UPI users can scan QR codes to make payments to Nepalese merchants.This comes after a tie-up between National Payments Corporation of India International Payments (NIPL) and Nepal's largest payment network Fonepay Payment Service in September 2023.In its first phase, the partnership will enable Indian consumers to make instant, secure, and convenient UPI payments across various business stores in Nepal by using UPI-enabled apps. Merchants acquired by the participating members of Fonepay Network can accept UPI payments from Indian customers.*—PTI*

ICAI to conduct exams three times a year

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) is likely to conduct the Chartered Accountants (CA) Foundation and Inter exams thrice a year. The announcement was made by the central council member (CCM) of ICAI DhirajKhandelwal. Sharing a post on X, he wrote, "Welcoming move by the ICAI to bring a beneficial change in favour of the CA student fraternity by introducing CA examinations thrice a year for CA Foundation and CA Inter level. Further Updates shall be clarified by the ICAI soon."Usually, ICAI conducts the CA examination twice a year. The exams are usually conducted in May-June and November-December sessions.*—PTI*

Signature Global to invest ₹2,200 cr for housing projects

GURUGRAM, 8 MARCH

Realty firm Signature Global will invest Rs 2,200 crore over the next five years to develop a new luxury housing project in Gurugram as part of its expansion plan amid strong consumer demand, its Chairman Pradeep Aggarwal said."We have launched a new housing project in Sector 37D, Gurugram on Dwarka Expressway. The total units will be 1,008 in the project," he said. The company has already sold the entire 1,008 luxury flats for over Rs 3,600 crore, reflecting strong consumer demand despite the price rise. Aggarwal said the company received 5,400 EoIs (Expressions of Interest) from customers in this new 16.5-acre housing project 'DE LUXE-DXP'.Housing demand has revived post-Covid pandemic across major cities driven largely by end-users, although investors have returned to the market with decent price appreciation in the last two years.Till December 2023, Signature Global has delivered a 6.7 million square feet area. It is developing a 16.9 million square feet area and also has a future pipeline of 28.4 million square feet of saleable area.*—PTI*

'Board seats held by women in India Inc surged 18pc in 5 yrs'

India's number is lower than the global average of 23.3 per cent

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

The number of board seats held by women across India Inc has increased gradually over the past five years with them holding 18.3 per cent board seats in 2023, a Deloitte report said on Friday.

'Women in the boardroom: A global perspective' report, however, said that it is lower than the global average of 23.3 per cent.

The report by Deloitte Global Boardroom Program analysed more than 18,000 companies in 50 countries exploring representation of women in the boardroom. This includes analysis of 400 companies from India.

The report shows a gradual increase in the number of board seats held by women across India Inc, with women holding 18.3 per cent board seats in 2023, up from 13.8 per cent in 2018, and 17.1 per cent in 2021, said the report released on the International Women's Day.

India's number is lower than the global average of 23.3 per cent, which has seen an increase of 3.6 per cent since 2022, reducing the timeline towards achieving parity by seven years – from 2045 to 2038.

"This indicates that even if India were to match the global pace, achieving gender parity on boards would still remain a distant goal until a robust pipeline of women leaders is developed," the report said.

The stretch factor among women in India increased to 1.32 in 2023 as compared to 1.30 in 2021 **PHOTO: X**

- The number of board seats held by women across India Inc has increased gradually over the past five years with them holding 18.3 per cent board seats in 2023, a Deloitte report said on Friday

Deloitte Global has developed the "stretch factor," a research tool that measures the average number of board seats an individual holds in a particular market. The higher the stretch factor, the more seats are held by any single director in a given market.

The stretch factor among women in India increased to 1.32 in 2023 as compared to 1.30 in 2021.

While the average stayed the same for men at 1.20. This further indicates a low pipeline of women leaders and stresses on the need to create a larger pool of women leaders with varied skillsets.

Although India saw a decline in board chairs held by women in 2023, with only 4.1 per cent of women chairing boards as compared to 4.5 per cent in 2018, it witnessed an increase in the number of women taking up CEO roles – 5.1 per cent female CEOs against 3.4 per cent in 2018.

Life sciences & healthcare sector is topping the chart with 21.3 per cent women on company boards, followed by technology, media and telecommunications (20.5 per cent), consumer business (19.7 per cent), manufacturing (17.4 per cent), and financial services (16.9 per cent), the report said. *—PTI*

14TH ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS

Britain's Business and Trade Secretary, and Minister for Women and Equalities Kemi Badenoch addresses the gathering **PHOTO: X**

FTA 'possible' before India polls: UK min

LONDON, 8 MARCH

A trade deal being negotiated with India is "possible" to be concluded before a general election in the country but Britain does not want to use that as a deadline, UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Kemi Badenoch has said.

The minister in charge of signing off on the free trade agreement (FTA), now in its 14th round of negotiations, pointed to India's "protectionist economy" in comparison with the UK's liberalised regime as one of the factors behind the long-drawn discussions.

Badenoch, who was speaking during a Global Trade conference at the think tank Chatham House on Thursday, stressed that she wanted to ensure a "commercially meaningful" pact as opposed to just a pre-election picture opportunity.

"India is still very protectionist where we are very, very liberalised," claimed Badenoch.

"I am not interested in just taking a picture and moving on. It has to be something that is commercially meaningful. People need to be able to say 'ah now I can do this', like we had with our Australia agreement or with Japan for example," she said, referring to FTAs with the two major economies.

India and the UK have been negotiating an FTA since January 2022 to significantly enhance GBP 36-billion bilateral trading partnership. The 13th round of talks concluded on 15 December 2023, with both sides hopeful that the ongoing fourteenth round will end in an agreement.

The UK wants India to significantly reduce tariffs on UK exports such as food, cars and whisky that can currently be as high as 150 per cent.

With both India and the UK set for a general election this year, signing off on a trade agreement has taken on particular urgency before leaders on both sides get into campaign mode. *—PTI*

Ministry of Coal takes initiative to enhance sustainability

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

In a move aimed at bolstering India's energy security and fostering a sustainable energy ecosystem, Ministry of Coal has unveiled a transformative initiative to diversify Coal CPSEs (Central Public Sector Enterprises).

According to a press release by Ministry of Coal, this initiative, which aligns seamlessly with the government's overarching vision of a future-ready and resilient energy landscape, seeks to broaden the scope of coal sector operations by venturing into renewable energy sources and critical minerals exploration.

Amidst evolving global energy paradigms and escalating environmental consciousness, Ministry of Coal is spearheading extensive diversification efforts within CPSEs, with a focus on establishing pit-head TPPs, solar power plants, wind mills, coal/lignite gasification plants, and critical mineral exploration.

The guidance aims to ensure sustainable operations for both Coal India Limited (CIL) and NLC India Limited (NLCIL), anticipating a future surplus in coal production.

The coal sector is poised to make significant strides in renewable energy adoption, with a collective solar capacity of approximately 1700 MW installed by CIL, NLCIL, and SCCL, supplemented by an additional 51 MW from wind mills.

Strategic partnerships between CIL and BHEL, as well as CIL and GAIL, underscore the commitment to reshape India's energy landscape through coal gasification initiatives.

Partnerships with overseas companies and active exploration of domestic critical minerals blocks underscore ministry's commitment to enhancing India's critical and strategic mineral supply. *—ANI*

Coal sector grows 10.2 pc in January

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

The coal sector has emerged as the frontrunner in driving industrial growth, achieving a remarkable growth rate of 10.2 per cent in January 2024, according to the latest data released by Ministry of Commerce and Industries.

According to a press release by Ministry of Coal, this growth, as per Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) (Base Year 2011-12), underscores the pivotal role played by the coal industry in propelling the nation's economic progress.

ICI measures the production performance of key sectors including cement, coal, crude oil, electricity, fertilizers, natural gas, refinery products, and steel.

Moreover, the cumulative index of the coal industry has witnessed a substantial increase of 12.2 per cent during April to January, 2023-24, over the same period in the previous fiscal year.

The coal industry's robust performance has significantly contributed to the overall expansion of the eight core industries, with the Combined Index experiencing a notable 3.6 per cent increase in January 2024 compared to the previous year. This underscores the coal sector's pivotal role in driving industrial growth and economic development. The exceptional growth of the coal sector can be attributed to Ministry of Coal's persistent efforts and proactive initiatives aimed at fostering industrial development. These endeavours contribute to the nation's progress. *—ANI*

Mutual funds continued their positive momentum with inflow of Rs 26,866 crore in February **PHOTO: X**

Equity MFs inflow nears 2-yr high at ₹ 26,866 cr

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Equity mutual funds continued their positive momentum with inflow of Rs 26,866 crore in February, making it the highest monthly infusion in 23 months, driven by massive interest for thematic funds and launch of new fund offerings (NFOs).

Also, the latest flow was about 23 per cent higher than inflows of Rs 21,780 crore in January.

Moreover, monthly Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) contributions reached a fresh high of Rs 19,186 crore, surpassing January's Rs 18,838 crore, according to the data released by Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Friday.

"As we delve into the Feb 2024 data, we observe that there is a surge in SIP accounts, totalling 8.20 crore with 49.79 lakh new SIP registrations. This underscores investors' unwavering commitment to disciplined wealth accumulation," VenkatChalasani, Chief Executive, AMFI, said.

Overall, the mutual fund industry witnessed an inflow of Rs 1.2 lakh crore in February, almost similar to the one seen in the preceding month. The huge inflow was driven by contributions from debt-oriented schemes at Rs 63,809 crore, equity schemes at Rs 26,866 crore and hybrid schemes at Rs 18,105 crore.

The strong inflow has pushed the net assets under management to Rs 54.54 lakh crore at February-end from Rs 52.74 lakh crore in the preceding month.

The flow in February this year was the highest since March 2022, when equity-oriented mutual funds witnessed an inflow of Rs 28,463 crore. Also, the latest flow marks the 36th consecutive month of net inflows in equity funds. The equity segment was also aided by eight new fund launches during the month which cumulatively garnered Rs 8,692 crore, Melvyn Santarita, Analyst, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

However, inflows in small cap and mid-cap dropped by 10 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively in the preceding month. *—PTI*

As many as eight lakh bank employees are set to benefit from the wage hike **PHOTO: X**

Bank employees to get 17% annual wage hike

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Indian Banks' Association and bank employee unions on Friday agreed on an annual wage hike of 17 per cent, a move that will result in an additional yearly outgo of around Rs 8,284 crore for public sector banks. As many as eight lakh bank employees are set to benefit from the wage hike, which will be effective from November 2022. All India Bank Officers' Confederation said that a joint note agreed to recognise all Saturdays as holidays, pending government notification. The revised working hours will be effective after notification by the government, it said. "The new pay scales have been constructed, after merging Dearness Allowance corresponding to 8088 points and additional load thereon," it said. Under the new wage settlement, all women employees would be allowed to take one day sick leave per month without giving a medical certificate. Accumulated privilege leave may be encashed up to 255 days at the time of retirement/upon death of an employee while in service, it said. For the retired employees, the monthly ex-gratia amount shall be paid in addition to the pension paid by the Public Sector Banks including SBI, to pensioners, who became eligible to draw pension on or before October 31, 2022. *—PTI*

Odisha okays 7 projects worth ₹80,125 crore

BHUBANESWAR, 8 MARCH

Odisha government has approved seven key projects with an investment of Rs 80,125 crore in different sectors.

The projects received the state government's nod at a High-Level Clearance Authority (HLCA) meeting chaired by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday.

These investments are expected to create job opportunities for 24,552 people in various sectors, including steel, green energy, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals, the official said.

These projects are spread over Khurda, Jagatsinghpur, Jharsuguda, Ganjam, and Bhadrak districts. Granules Life Sciences Private Limited, a leading producer of paracetamol in India, has proposed to set up its pharmaceutical unit at Tata SEZ, Gopalpur in Ganjam district.

The company aims to produce 4 billion units of paracetamol, metformin, ibuprofen and other pharma products, for which it will pump in Rs 1,100 crore in the Ganjam plant, generating jobs for around 1,500 people.

Action Ispat proposed to expand its steel production capacity from 0.37 MTPA to 7.5 MTPA at its Jharsuguda plant, for which it will pump in Rs 21,000 crores, creating job opportunities for another 10,000 people.

OFB Tech Private Limited will set up a manufacturing unit at Dhamra in Bhadrak, investing Rs 1,615 crore, and creating jobs for 1,500 people.

"The state government has been consistently supportive of business leaders investing in the state. With these projects moving forward, Odisha's economy is expected to experience significant growth, solidifying its position as the top choice for investments and industrial development in eastern India," the Industries Department said in a statement. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- Odisha government has approved seven key projects with an investment of Rs 80,125 crore in different sectors.

Forex kitty jumps USD 6.55 bn to USD 625.63 bn

MUMBAI, 8 MARCH

India's forex reserves jumped USD 6.55 billion to USD 625.626 billion for the week ended March 1, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had risen by USD 2.975 billion to USD 619.072 billion.

It can be noted that in October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.

For the week ended March 1, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 6.043 billion to USD 554.231 billion, the data said.Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.Gold reserves increased by USD 569 million to USD 48.417 billion during the week, the RBI said.The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 17 million to USD 18.18 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position was also down by USD 41 million to USD 4.798 billion. *—PTI*

CRISIL SAYS

'Veg thali turns costlier in Feb, non-veg cheaper'

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

A vegetarian thali became dearer by 7 per cent in February primarily on the upsurge in onion and tomato prices, according to rating agency Crisil. A cool down in poultry prices led to non-veg thali becoming cheaper by 9 per cent, Crisil Market Intelligence and Analysis said in its monthly "Roti Rice Rate" report released on Friday.

The cost of a vegetable thali, which comprises roti, vegetables (onions, tomatoes and potatoes), rice, dal, curd and salad, increased to Rs 27.5 per plate in February from Rs 25.6 in the year-ago period, it said. "The cost of the veg thali increased due to a surge of 29 per cent and 38 per cent on-year in prices of onion and tomato, respectively," it said, adding that rice and pulses have also got dearer.

However, the thali was cheaper when compared with the Rs 28 in the preceding month of January. In the case of non-veg thali, which comprises all the same ingredients but dal gets replaced by chicken, the price declined to Rs 54 as compared to Rs 59.2 in the year-ago period, but was higher when compared with January's Rs 52.

A 20 per cent decline in the cost of the broiler prices, which has a 50 per cent weightage in the overall price, was the primary reason for the decline in the cost of non-veg thali on a year-on-year basis, it said. When compared with January, the prices of broiler increased by 10 per cent on the bird flu outbreak in Andhra Pradesh impacting supply and higher demand ahead of the holy month of Ramadan, the report said. *—PTI*

The cost of the veg thali increased due to surge of onion and tomato prices **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PTI

Ali Zadran retires from international cricket

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Veteran Afghanistan batter Noor Ali Zadran has announced his retirement from international cricket, bringing down curtains on an international career spanning more than a decade.The 35-year-old, who starred with a 28-ball 45 in Afghanistan's first-ever ODI against Scotland in 2009, played his final game last week at the Tolerance Oval in the Test match against Ireland."Top-order batter @NoorAliZadran decided to call time on his international cricket. He has represented #AfghanAtalan in 2 Tests, 51 ODIs and 23 T20Is and has scored 1930 runs with 11 fifties and a hundred to his name," Afghanistan Cricket Board tweeted on Thursday.—*AP*

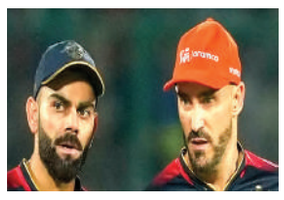


PHOTO: PTI

Kohli's longevity is connected to fitness: Du Plessis

BENGALURU, 8 MARCH

Virat Kohli's unwavering passion for fitness is the secret behind his longevity at top-flight cricket and young cricketers should take a cue from that to build a career of their own, reckoned Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis.Kohli brought in a culture change in the Royal Challengers dressing room during his time as their skipper, making fitness a non-negotiable part of a player's life."He's amazing, he trains hard, he's very fit. I feel in today's age of sport, you have to be like that if you're looking for longevity. So, he will be a great example," Du Plessis told Star Sports.Du Plessis said talent alone will not help a budding player to construct an extended career at top-level sport.
—*PTI*

PHOTO: IANS

Sindhu loses against Chen in the French Open

PARIS, 8 MARCH

India's P V Sindhu produced a gallant fight before marginally falling short against reigning Olympic champion Chen Yu Fei of China in an epic quarterfinal at the French Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Friday.On a comeback trail from a four-month-long injury layoff, Sindhu gave ample display of her strokeplay and physical fitness during a marathon one hour and 32-minute battle before settling for a 24-22 17-21 18-21 loss to the second seed and defending champion Chen in a riveting last eight battle here.—*AP*

Sainz Jr. is out of Saudi Arabian GP due to illness

JEDDAH, 8 MARCH

Carlos Sainz Jr. was ruled out of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix with appendicitis on Friday, with Ferrari handing 18-year-old Oliver Bearman his Formula 1 debut hours before qualifying.Sainz "has been diagnosed with appendicitis and will require surgery," Ferrari said in a statement.The team has promoted Bearman, its British reserve driver who usually competes in Formula 2, for the rest of the race weekend starting with Friday's third practice session.
—*AP*

Rohit, Gill put India in driver's seat despite late batting collapse

Ben Stokes wicket 'written in the stars': Jeetan Patel

DHARAMSALA, 8 MARCH

Skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill's splendid hundreds gave India complete control of the fifth Test against England despite a late batting collapse that saw the hosts end day two at 473 for eight on Friday.

India lost as many as five wickets for 97 runs in the final session after Rohit (103 off 162 balls) and Gill (110 off 150 balls) shared a stroke-filled 171-run partnership off 244 balls for the second wicket. Debutant Devdutt Padikkal (65 off 103) showed a lot of class in his debut innings while Sarfaraz Khan (56 off 60) was guilty of throwing away his wicket first ball after tea.

The home team, which began the day at 135 for one, led England by 255 runs at stumps. Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir (4/170 in 44 overs), who was taken to the cleaners by the Indian openers, bounced back strongly to take three wickets in the final session. Left-arm spinner Tom Hartley (2/126 in 39) too was impressive towards the end of the day while Mark Wood (0/89 in 15) was the most expensive.

Shubman Gill (L) and Rohit Sharma PHOTO: PTI

It was as if the stars aligned for **Ben Stokes** to bowl that magic ball to his opposite number Rohit Sharma on day two of the fifth Test, feels England assistant coach Jeetan Patel.

Ben Stokes PHOTO: AFP

Right after lunch, the England captain bowled a peach of a delivery, his first in competitive cricket in the past nine months, to remove Rohit, who had already scored his second hundred of the series.

Stokes, who had been bowling only in the nets thus far, finally decided to roll his arm over in a match situation after nothing went England's way in the morning session.

He had stopped bowling owing to a knee injury and had undergone surgery last year.

Bowling the second over of the afternoon session, Stokes produced a peach that seamed away a touch from good length to dislodge Rohit's off-stump.

India 473 for 8 (Gill 110, Rohit 103, Padikkal 65, Sarfaraz 56, Bashir 4-170, Hartley 2-126) lead England 218 by 255 runs.
—*PTI*

UPW WOMEN VS DC WOMEN

Deepti's heroics give a one-run win over DC

NEW DELHI, 8 MARCH

Deepti Sharma's all-round heroics steered UP Warriorz to a thrilling one-run win over Delhi Capitals in their Women's Premier League match here on Friday.

Opting to bat, Deepti Sharma (59) scored a fine fifty but DC bowlers managed to restrict UP Warriorz to a below-par 138 for 8.

Alyssa Healy (29) and Grace Harris (14) were the others to manage double-digit figures for UP.

In reply, skipper Meg Lanning slammed a 46-ball 60, her fourth fifty in the ongoing tournament, as DC looked in control to chase down the total, reaching 93 in the 14th over.

But Deepti scalped four wickets for 19 runs in her quota of four overs, including a hat-trick as DC were bundled out for 137 in 19.5 overs.

Deepti first Indian to get a hat-trick PHOTO: PTI

Saima Thakor (2/30) also snapped two wickets.

For DC, Titas Sadhu (2/23) and Radha Yadav (2/16) picked two wickets each.

Brief Score:

UP Warriorz: 138 for 8 in 20 overs (Deepti Sharma 59; Titas Sadhu 2/23, Radha Yadav 2/16).

Delhi Capitals: 137 all out in 19.5 overs (Meg Lanning 60; Deepti Sharma 4/19).
—*PTI*

AKASH AND RAVI BAG TOP TWO PLACES IN U16 RACE

MANGALURU, 8 MARCH

Akash Pujar and Ravi Pujar gave a fine beginning to India bagging the top two spots in the Junior U16 race during the first-ever India Paddle Festival here on Friday.The local lad Akash walked away with the winner's trophy with a timing of 43:04 minutes, while his cousin Ravi finished second stopping the clock at 47:24 minutes.Jihoo Hwang from South Korea secured the third position, completing the race in 52:52 minutes."I have dedicated the past six months to continuous training, while also managing the academic pressure of being in the 10th standard. Despite those challenges, I ensure I do not pause my training and I guess that's what paid off today," said Akash.—*PTI*

Badminton Player Padma Bhushan and Arjun Awardee Saina Nehwal with Air Force Family Welfare Association (Regional) during sports meet on the occasion of International Womens Day celebrations at AFFWA (R) Training Command, IAF, in Bengaluru on Friday PHOTO: PTI

Sumit Nagal PHOTO: AFP

Sumit Nagal bows out of Indian Wells ATP

INDIAN WELLS, 8 FEB

Sumit Nagal was handed a straight-set defeat by Canada's Milos Raonic in the opening round of the BNP Paribas Open here, bringing a swift end to the Indian tennis player's campaign after he made the main draw as a 'lucky loser' due to Rafael Nadal's pullout.

Nagal, who is ranked 101st in the ATP charts, went down 3-6, 3-6 in a match that lasted one hour and 28 minutes. Raonic, who entered the match with a protected ranking of 224, converted three of the 12 break points he earned during the encounter. Nagal, on the other hand, could not manage to make good of the two break points he got.
—*AP*

Jake Paul to fight Mike Tyson on 20 July

ARLINGTON, 8 MARCH

Social media star-turned-boxer Jake Paul will fight former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson on 20 July at AT&T Stadium, Netflix announced Thursday.

The streaming platform will provide live coverage of the bout between 27-year-old Paul and 57-year-old Tyson, who hasn't fought since he took on Roy Jones Jr. in an exhibition in November 2020. In its recent forays into live sports production, Paul and Tyson will be the main event of the first combat sports show for Netflix.

It's still uncertain whether this about will be staged as an actual pro fight or an exhibition, particularly given the age of Tyson, who will be 58 by July. The specifics still must be approved by the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, which regulates boxing in the state.

Tyson posts workout videos on social media in which he looks sharp in training, but boxing is dangerous at any age. The California State Athletic Commission required his bout against Jones to be an exhibition essentially a lively sparring session.

Paul built a significant fan following as a YouTube influencer before he embarked on a professional boxing career four years ago. He has won nine of 10 fights with six knockouts against mostly undistinguished opponents, including several mixed martial artists and a fellow YouTuber.

His only loss came last year to Tommy Fury, the less-accomplished half-brother of WBC heavyweight champion Tyson Fury.

"My sights are set on becoming a world champion, and now I have a chance to prove myself against the greatest heavyweight champion of the world, the worst man on the planet, and the most dangerous boxer of all time. Time to put Iron Mike to sleep," Paul wrote on X, formerly Twitter.
—*AP*

Combination picture of social media star-turned-boxer Jake Paul and former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson. PHOTO: AFP

IPL has made all three formats more competitive: Dhumal

DHARMASALA, 8 MARCH

The Indian Premier League has not only played an important role in talent identification over the years but has also made all three formats of the game more competitive, league chairman Arun Dhumal said on Friday.

Since its maiden season in 2008, the IPL and T20 cricket have grown exponentially. Several players including the likes of Jasprit Bumrah, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Rinku Singh have gone on to get the coveted India cap after stellar performances in the lucrative league.

"IPL has done a phenomenal job as far as the identification of new boys is concerned. We have seen, every season you will have very talented youngsters coming in like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rinku Singh," Dhumal told PTI Video in an exclusive chat here.

"They have then played for India also, so that way IPL has turned out to be a great tournament for the young talent and hopefully this season is going to be no different," he added.
—*PTI*

Arun Dhumal PHOTO: AFP

Lahiri shoots four-under 66 in the opening round

HONG KONG, 8 FEB

Indian ace Anirban Lahiri shot four-under 66 in the opening round of the LIV Golf Hong Kong and trailed leaders Dean Burmester and Abraham Ancer by three shots.

Burmester and Ancer shot 63 each at the Hong Kong Golf Club.Leaders Burmester and Ancer are one stroke ahead of the six-man chasing pack that includes Louis Oosthuizen, Charles Howell III, Eugenio Chacarra, Harold Varner III, Matt Jones, and Martin Kaymer, whose 64 is his lowest score in a LIV Golf tournament.

Another stroke back is DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka.Lahiri was tied for 11th with six others.In the team event, the Stingers grabbed the first-round lead at a team score of 16 under.
—*AP*

Sunshine Ladies Tour: Tvesa Malik finishes 26th

GAUTENG, 8 MARCH

India's Tvesa Malik produced a card of one-over 73 in the third and final round to sign off Tied-26th in the Fidelity ADT Ladies Challenge on the Sunshine Ladies Tour here.

Tvesa (74-71), who battled hard to cut a day earlier, had a roller coaster of a final round with four birdies and five bogeys and finished at 2-over 218.

Tvesa had a fine start with birdies on the Par-5s at the third and fifth, but she gave back both those shots with bogeys on the sixth and the eighth. She picked a third birdie on the ninth to turn in 1-under.

However, bogeys on the 11th, 15th, and 17th pulled her back again. She picked another birdie on the 18th to finish at 1-over.

Tvesa, a former Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour No. 1, won the SuperSport Ladies Challenge for her first international win two weeks ago. She is now fifth on the Sunshine Ladies Order of Merit.

Helen Kreuzer of Germany shot 66 and was tied at the top with Denmark's Tina Mazarino (65), who had a 5-under 31 on the back nine to force a play-off. Both players were 12-under after 54 holes. Then, Kreuzer won the play-off for the title.

Overnight leader, Ellen Hutchinson-Kay of Sweden, finished with a final round of 72 and a total of 9-under 207.
—*AP*

India's Tvesa Malik produced a card of one-over 73 in the third and final round PHOTO: AFP

INDIAN CHALLENGE ENDS AT NAGPUR OPEN ITF

NAGPUR, 8 MARCH

Indian challenge ended at the W35 Nagpur Open ITF Women's Championships, with the ouster of Sahaja Yamlapalli from the singles and Shrivalli Bhamidipathy and Vaidehi Chaudari from the doubles category here on Friday.In the singles quarterfinal, fifth seed Sahaja was stunned by unseeded Dayeon Back 4-6 1-6.Later in the doubles semifinal, Korean Yeonwoo Ku and Lithuania's Justina Mikulskyte defeated the local duo of Shrivalli and Vaidehi 6-2 2-6 10-8 in a keenly contested match.In other quarterfinal matches, runner-up at the Gurgaon event last week, Yeonwoo Ku of Korea kept her singles hopes alive, beating Russian Ekaterina Yashina 6-1 6-0 to progress to the last four.In Saturday's semifinals, Ku will take on another Russian Daria Kudashova, who carved out a 6-4 6-3 win over Rinon Okuwaki of Japan.Second-seeded Dalila Jakupovic remained the highest seed to survive in the tournament as she registered a come-from-behind 5-7 6-1 6-2 win over seventh-seeded Miriana Tona of Italy. Dalila will be up against Dayton in the semi-final.
—*PTI*

EUROPA LEAGUE

Liverpool stroll past Sparta, Roma thrash Brighton

MADRID, 8 MARCH

Liverpool surged towards the Europa League quarter-finals with a 5-1 win at Sparta Prague on Thursday, as Roma thrashed Brighton 4-0 in the Italian capital.

Brighton's first foray into European football looks over at the last-16 stage after the Seagulls were thrashed by in-form Roma.

AC Milan beat 10-man Slavia Prague 4-2, but Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen had to come from 2-0 down to preserve their unbeaten season in a 2-2 draw against Qarabag.

Liverpool remain on course to send Jurgen Klopp off with a quadruple of trophies as the Reds were not distracted by Sunday's mammoth Premier League showdown against Manchester City.

Klopp named a strong side and got what he wanted by killing off the tie in the first leg, even if there was a price to pay in further injury problems as center-back Ibrahima Konate limped off.

Alexis Mac Allister got the visitors off to the perfect start in the Czech capital as he won and converted a penalty after just seven minutes.

Sparta had dumped out Galatasaray in the previous round and created plenty of chances against a makeshift Liverpool defense.

But the difference in quality between the sides showed in the final third.

Darwin Nunez's dipping shot from long-range outfoxed Peter Jensen to make it 2-0 before the Uruguayan smashed home Mac Allister's through ball in first-half stoppage time.

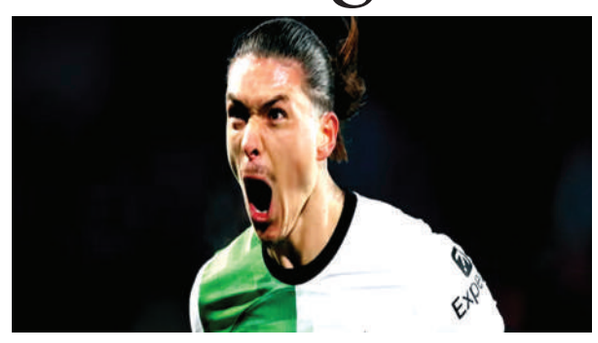
"He has the most important attitude a striker needs to have in these chances," Klopp said of Nunez.

"He's just a constant threat and he gives us some spaces and areas and options."

Conor Bradley replaced Joe Gomez at half-time and his first act was to fire into the top corner of his own goal one minute into the second half.

But Luis Diaz's deflected effort quickly restored Liverpool's three-goal cushion.

Mohamed Salah made his comeback from a hamstring injury as a substitute and thought he had marked his return with a goal, but a VAR review disallowed his strike for offside.
—*AP*



Liverpool's Darwin Nunez celebrates after scoring their third goal PHOTO: AFP